

# FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 135 February/March 1997

(unwaged 30p) 50p

## Left with no choice?

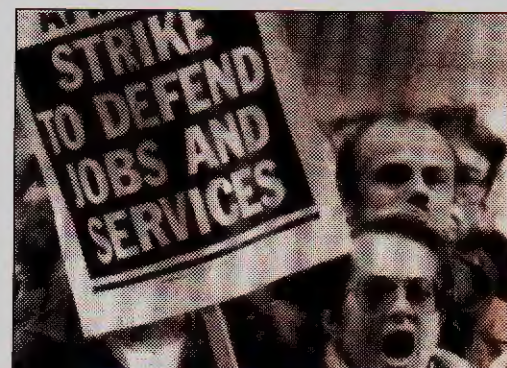


# DON'T VOTE ORGANISE!

### Inside:

**EDITORIAL - Don't  
vote Labour p2**

Solidarity  
price  
£1



**NEW LABOUR - no vote for class  
enemies p4/5**

**CUBA VIVE - Defending socialism  
in Cuba: No Pasaran! brigade  
takes a mobile disco to Cuba.  
Reports, eye-witness accounts;  
World Festival of Youth and  
Students p7/8/9/10**



**ZIONISM - policing the Middle  
East for imperialism p11**

**BRITISH STATE - tooled up for  
repression p12**

**WHITEMOOR ESCAPE TRIAL -  
British state tries to keep the lid  
on a scandal p16**



**NEWS, PRISONERS FIGHTBACK,  
REVIEWS, LETTERS**



# Don't vote for Labour

Gordon Brown has declared war on the working class. That is the meaning of his pledge that an incoming Labour Government will neither raise tax rates during its possible five-year life nor change Tory public spending plans for the next two years. In other words, vote Labour and there will be no change. The Tory tax robbery system will stay in place. This means that the richest 10 per cent of earners will continue to benefit to the tune of £16 billion each year compared to what they would have paid in income tax in 1979. Whilst they pay 23 per cent of their income in all forms of taxes, the poorest pay 39 per cent, penalised as they are by VAT and council tax; they have lost £13 per week since 1979. And if those on benefit find low-paid work, they face an effective tax rate on earnings of up to 98% through deductions from benefits. Meanwhile tax on business stands at 5.9 per cent of GDP compared to an average 10.5 per cent of GDP for the G7 group of leading capitalist countries. But Labour will not change any of this! By ruling out even an increase of the top tax rate from 40 per cent to 50 per cent they are ensuring those who earn £100,000 or more that they can hang on to the £43,000 they have pocketed from Tory tax policies.

Labour's commitment to Tory public spending plans means that they will continue to cut real spending on state welfare, education and health. 4.3 million children live in poverty, but only 1.4 million children are able to have free school meals. No wonder two million children are now malnourished. But Labour have agreed not to change this either. The Tory budget for 1997/98 imposed cuts of £500 million in housing expenditure, raised prescription charges to £5.65, cut the local authority education allocation by £121 million, and froze health spending in real terms for the next two years. All this will stay the same if Labour come to office. Nor will they change the ruling that single people living alone will only get housing benefit equivalent to the average rent of a room in a shared house.

Blair, Brown, Straw and all the rest of New Labour are looking after their own – the affluent middle class, the lawyers, journalists, doctors, professionals

and managers from whom Labour draws its MPs, councillors, members and support. The forthcoming general election will therefore be a complete charade. The Tory Party will fight it on the basis of robbing the poor to pay the rich. But then so will the Labour Party. This is what is laughably called British democracy. We are supposed to make a choice between

cial total has fallen below two million whilst in reality it remains over four million.

But where will Labour make a difference? It will retain and extend all the repressive legislation that has been passed over the last 17 years. The absence of significant internal divisions, the insignificant left-wing, and the removal of any inner-party democracy means it is far better



Gordon Brown commits the Labour Party to Tory spending plans

Tweedledum and Tweedledee and live with the consequences for the next five years.

Let there be no doubt about the vicious character of this Tory government. In the five years since the last general election they have continued where the previous three administrations had left off. In the north of Ireland they have continued to sustain the loyalist sectarian statelet through the charade of 'peace negotiations'. In the Middle East they have allowed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children to die through their support for the UN blockade. They have supported nationalist and fascist forces in the bloody war in the former Yugoslavia. At home they have piled repressive legislation upon repressive legislation, most notably with the Criminal Justice Act and now the Police Bill. They have extended the powers available to police under immigration legislation to allow them for instance to mount 'fishing expeditions' in work places to look for 'illegal' immigrants. They have passed the Asylum Act and removed social security benefits from those seeking asylum, leaving hundreds destitute, dependent on charity to survive. Living standards have continued to fall for the poorest sections of the population. Further changes to the way the jobless total is calculated under the Jobseeker's Allowance means that the offi-

placed than the Tories to mount a concerted attack on state welfare spending. It will continue with a bipartisan foreign policy and will maintain its support for the loyalist ascendancy. It will retain all existing immigration controls. It will not repeal either the Asylum Act or the Jobseeker's Allowance. In fact it will be more oppressive, more racist, more anti-working class than the Tory government it is almost certain to replace.

Democracy in Britain today means the exclusion of the working class from all political life. Their interests do not matter to rich, politicians, nor particularly do their votes. It is, after all, in the marginal, predominantly middle class constituencies of the South East and to some extent the Midlands that the outcome of the 1997 general election will be determined. In fact, the only concern that the middle class have for the poor is whether they will be good domestic servants – there are now about a million doing the washing, cleaning and child-minding for these parasites. In such conditions we call for a complete break with Labour. There is no choice for the working class but to begin the fight to establish its own independent political organisation and to assert its own interests against those of the rich and powerful. The message is: don't vote – organise!

**Fight for jobs, homes, decent benefits and a living wage for all**

- organise to defend the unemployed, the homeless, families threatened with homelessness, the low paid, the pensioners
- fight the Jobseeker's Allowance
- end all means-testing
- for a decent minimum pension linked to the rise in average pay
- fight the anti-trade union laws

**Fight for a decent education for all**

- abolish private schools and the grant-maintained school system
- abolish all forms of selection
- restore free school milk and dinners for all primary school children
- restore all cuts in local library services

**Fight for a decent health service**

- end the NHS internal market
- abolish GP fundholding
- abolish the Private Finance Initiative
- end the compulsory tendering of services
- end all prescription charges, and all charges for eye tests and dental treatment

**Defend democratic rights**

- defend the right to silence
- repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Public Order Act, the Criminal Justice Act, the Security Services Act and the Police Bill if it becomes law
- reinstate the right to challenge jurors

**Fight for women's rights and an end to discrimination on grounds of sexuality**

- state-subsidised nurseries and childcare available to all who want it
- full employment and pension rights for all regardless of length of time in a job
- immediate end to all anti-gay and lesbian discrimination
- free abortion on demand

**Fight to defend the environment**

- stop the roads programme
- for a cheap and integrated public transport system

**Fight racism!**

- repeal all immigration controls
- repeal the Asylum Act
- self defence is no offence – fight racist attacks
- defend all under attack from the racist police and courts

**Fight imperialism!**

- oppose British occupation of Ireland: troops out now!
- oppose British imperialist collaboration with Zionism and Turkish fascism
- oppose imperialist threats against Iraq and Libya – hands off the Middle East! Self-determination for Kurdistan!
- support for liberation movements in all oppressed nations
- oppose the US blockade of Cuba



## Unison betrays Hillingdon strikers

ROBERT CLOUGH

In a singular act of treachery, Unison has abandoned the 53 predominantly Asian women strikers at Hillingdon Hospital. Their strike is in protest against a wage cut of 20 per cent imposed by Pall Mall who won the contract when Hillingdon put its cleaning services out to compulsory competitive tendering. It took two months and an occupation of Unison offices before the union made their strike official on 27 November 1995. Since then the strikers have kept up a continuous picket of the hospital, obtained widespread support and made common cause with the Liverpool dockers.

However, the Unison leadership has abandoned a commitment at its 1996 conference to support the women until they were all reinstated. Instead it

accepted an offer of £250,000 compensation from Pall Mall without consulting the strikers. It then attempted to meet with the strikers individually to secure their agreement to this treachery. The strikers refused, and the union had to call on the police to prevent them and their supporters taking over its headquarters during a protest picket.

Pledging their determination to continue, strike leader Malkiat Bilku said 'We are not going to take the money, we will not sell ourselves for a few thousand pounds... We've got our dignity. They (the union) are on the side of the bosses. We are not giving up, we have stuck it out for 16 months and we are winning. We are going to join up with the Liverpool dockers.'

Messages of support and donations to: **Hillingdon Hospital Support Campaign, c/o Councillor Kennedy, Civic Centre, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 1UW.**

## A case of continued injustice

NICKI JAMESON

Suppose that every time an IRA bomb went off in England the Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4 were pulled in for questioning. John McGranaghan, who was freed by the Court of Appeal in 1991 after 11 years wrongful imprisonment, is being subjected to equivalent treatment and has asked FRFI to publish the details.

John was convicted of a series of rapes and sentenced to double life plus 70 years imprisonment, such was the brutality of the attacks. Received into prison as a rapist, a 'nonce', a 'sex-case', John had not only to fight to finally gain his freedom, but also to do daily battle with prison officers, psychiatrists and those prisoners who believed the lies about him. Members of the Birmingham 6, who are John's friends, say that despite their years of suffering they would prefer to have been framed for bombings than be in John's shoes, wrongly convicted of sexual offences.

John McGranaghan's innocence was proven beyond a shadow of a doubt at his appeal. He was not freed on technicalities but as the result of incontestable forensic evidence never produced at his trial. Since his release he has attempted to put his life back together but has never forgotten those who supported him in gaol and continues to give his solidarity to other prisoners struggling against miscarriages of justice.

On 8 January 1997 two offi-

cers from Mitcham police station turned up at John's home in south London and asked if he would be willing to make a statement regarding his whereabouts on 15 July 1992, the day Rachel Nickell was murdered on Wimbledon Common. He was told the enquiry was 'routine' and agreed to make a statement in the presence of his solicitor.

John told FRFI: 'The police felt strongly – and wrongly – that Colin Stagg was the killer of the young woman. Colin Stagg is a young man – I'm nearly 60 years old. I can only come to the conclusion that these "routine enquiries" are nothing but pure harassment.'

This outrageous incident is not the only one of its kind. John was also visited by Scottish police who claimed to be investigating unsolved murders from the 1970s. Other freed framed prisoners, including Kevin Callan who was released in 1995, have also been interviewed about crimes vaguely similar to their wrongful convictions. This is an insidious form of harassment designed to ensure that such ex-prisoners are always looking over their shoulders. It relies on the assumption that the crimes involved are so anti-social that these men will not complain, as even a vague association will create public doubt about their innocence. John McGranaghan will not be intimidated and has chosen to speak out about the way in which the injustice he suffered in prison for 11 years continues to be used against him five years after his release. ■

### COMMUNIST FORUMS

#### LONDON

Sunday 16 March 2.30pm  
New Labour:  
no vote for class enemies  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,  
WC1 (Holborn tube) £1/50p

#### MANCHESTER

Thursday 20 February 7.30pm  
Defend socialist Cuba!  
Friends Meeting House, Mount St

Write to FRFI, BCM Box 5909,  
London WC1N 3XX or tel:  
0171 837 1688 for further details



## Liverpool dockers' struggle continues



ROBERT CLOUGH

On Friday 20 December, a mass meeting of the Liverpool dockers voted overwhelmingly to reject a so-called 'final' offer from the Merseyside Docks and Harbour Company. All that was on the table were redundancy payments of up to £28,000, and the possibility of 40 ancillary jobs. The Torside workers, whose picket line the dockers had originally refused to cross, were excluded from any settlement terms altogether.

This followed a 3,000-strong march through the centre of London the previous week. This was notable for a number of reasons. First, the left was conspicuous by its absence. There were tiny contingents from the SWP and Militant, organisations which claim up to 10,000 members and which regularly proclaim their support for the dock-

ers' struggle. Second, there was a general willingness by many demonstrators to discuss serious political issues such as the role of New Labour and its trade union allies. Lastly, there was a near-universal hostility to the Labour Party, best expressed by the widespread hissing that greeted the chair's announcement she was a member of the scab organisation.

A further indication of the mood was the ecstatic reception given to John Pilger, whose articles in *The Guardian* have taken up the absence of any meaningful support from either New Labour or the T&G leadership. On the day of the march itself he quoted a senior American inspector of the International Transport Federation as saying that a victory for the dockers 'would offer an alternative to the defeatist strategy [of the British trade union establishment] that has so far lost every port save Liverpool.

much to the dismay of maritime workers around the globe... This aristocracy of labour, while bemoaning draconian Thatcherite anti-labour laws - which their darling Tony Blair has vowed to uphold if elected! - actually use them as an excuse for inaction.'

The message is clear: the privileged upper stratum of the working class which runs the trade union movement has no interest in the struggles of the working class since these would involve a struggle against trade union laws which are supported by New Labour. This division in the working class underlies the betrayal of the Hillingdon workers: Unison is a union run by the middle class for the middle class. The leadership was not prepared to risk the union's £150 million assets for the sake of the oppressed. And neither is the leadership of the T&G, who also have hundreds of millions of pounds of assets as well as their well-paid jobs to protect. Hence Bill Morris may have told the TUC conference he would 'die for the dockers', but in practice he has not met the demand from one of the dockers' wives who was not allowed to speak: 'Don't die, just support us'.

The recent announcement by the Ford motor car company that it was seeking 1,300 redundancies from the 4,500 workers employed at its Halewood plant on Merseyside gives a further significance to the struggle of the dockers. The reason Halewood workers are being sacked is because the laws on employment rights are much tougher in Germany and Spain - it is cheaper and less trouble to fire workers in Britain. It is to be hoped that the response of the Ford workers follows the exemplary lead given by the dockers.

## No right to demonstrate

CAROL BRICKLEY

The provisions of the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act are being imposed to prevent peaceful assemblies of 20 or more people. As a result of a High Court decision, police will have carte blanche to impose conditions on the right to assemble and demonstrate if they fear 'serious disruption to the life of the community'.

The case resulted from a static demonstration near Stonehenge in 1995. The police had imposed an order under the Act banning demonstrations of



more than 20 within four miles of the monument. Even though the group involved had not breached the perimeter fence round Stonehenge, the police demanded they move and then arrested demonstrators under the Act for trespassory assem-

bly. The demonstrators were convicted in the magistrates court, but succeeded on appeal to the Crown Court. The appeal to the High Court was brought by the prosecution, and despite the fact that the demonstration was entirely peaceful and there was in fact no-one to obstruct, the demonstrators were again found guilty. The High Court judgement will set a binding precedent.

The State and the police have been trying to establish these provisions for many years. Their previous attempt in the Public Order Act 1986 allowed the police to impose restrictions on static demonstrations of 20 or more only if there was a 'serious threat to public order'. The courts, because of precedent on what is 'a serious threat to public order' were forced to apply this restrictively. By substituting 'fear of serious disruption to the life of the community', the State has substantially widened the restriction. Interference with Saturday shoppers or traffic, for instance, could be interpreted to constitute such a threat, and the disruption does not need to be actual, only feared by the police. As indicated by this judgement there does not need to be an actual obstruction.

One of the defendants, Dr Margaret Jones, intends to appeal to the House of Lords, and to the European Court of Human Rights if necessary: 'This ruling is extremely bad for democracy in this country. It supports something that is illiberal, undemocratic and wrong.'

## Education notes

'Education, Education and Education.' (Tony Blair, Labour Party Conference 1996)

As they enter the ring for the general election both parties have declared that education is the top of their agenda. So-called policies come thick and fast: home-school contracts, compulsory homework times, centres of excellence, homework centres, reading recovery centres to boost literacy and centres to contain 'disruptive' children. Each party boasts about the prudence of its proposals and brags about the low cost of the education service it will provide.

### Children in need too expensive

A recent report has sent out an alert about the cost of providing for an increasing number of children with special learning needs (SLN), also known as special education needs (SEN). In 1994 the government introduced a bureaucratic Code of Practice for Special Needs in five stages which requires detailed documentation about the difficulties of the child and regular reviews of the school's own provision and responses. Secondary schools of 1,000 students may have 300 special needs pupils and need to employ a teacher just to operate these paper-filling procedures. A full statement of special needs means the local educa-

tion authority (LEA) is statutorily required to provide extra help. Despite the time-consuming demands of the form-filling, the number of fully statemented children has risen and it is predicted that 5% of children will be fully statemented in two years time. SEN now costs on average 12.5% of LEA budgets and this is much higher in poor inner city areas. Special and extra help is seen as taking money away from the educational provision of other pupils. 'We are facing a big moral problem which needs to be sorted out,' says Mike Nichol from management consultants Coopers and Lybrand which produced the report. We certainly are! The pre-election spectacle of both parties fighting over who can spend least on children, and indeed children with special needs, is obscene.

### Big Business comes to the aid of the parties?

The government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was introduced four years ago and is supported by the Labour Party. Its purpose is to assure tax payers that public spending can be made without increased taxes (while at the same time helping their friends to some extra business). The Pimlico School in central London was to have been the first to receive funds via PFI. The project has just collapsed because the construction firm Taylor Woodrow has

pulled out of the plan to rebuild the school for 1,450 pupils with adjacent luxury flats for sale. It simply did not turn out to be a profitable enough investment.

### British schools and British supermarkets

The government says that the dignity of the British monarchy symbolised by the Royal Yacht Britannia should not be soiled by association with private sponsorship and the associated advertising, logos and salesmanship. However, for the education of our children this has been encouraged and both Labour and Tories are delighted to see schools, equipment and pupils embellished with business and industry logos and advertising. One source of private investment that is providing a good rate of return is the large retail chains.

Four of the main British supermarkets, ASDA, Sainsbury plc, the Co-op and Tesco have been supported by SCIP (the School Curriculum Industry Partnership) in targeting schools for 'cause-related marketing'. This, in the words of a Tesco spokesperson, leads to a 'virtuous circle creating win-win situations'. The idea is that parents collect vouchers to give to the school which can then cash them in for resources.

So far Tesco has 'given' £28 million of school computing equipment in return for vouchers which represent £2.8 billion worth of groceries. Asda's 'Best for kids' campaign has persuaded parents in 8,000 schools to collect vouchers for Compaq

Computers. The Co-op provides vouchers for musical instruments, while Sainsbury's 'Schoolbags' scheme has been taken up by 16,000 primary and 2,500 secondary schools. This year the 'Son of Schoolbags' scheme offers vouchers for every £10 spent by those who bring their own plastic bags to the store - 'a tremendous environmental benefit', in the words of a Sainsbury representative.

Who really benefits from the frenetic consumer spending that these schemes encourage? For Tesco's 'Computers for Schools '96', parents had to spend £125,000 - £150,000 in just 10 weeks to get vouchers for one computer costing £1,000 or £1,500 in the shops. That represents a 1% saving for the shopper, often parents pressurised into buying more than they can afford. Last financial year Tesco's pre-tax profit on £13 billion sales was £681 million. Asda's vouchers for computers cost the equivalent of £75,000 spent for every Compaq 486 retailing at £1,200. This is a 'partnership' in which one side wins big sales and the other is bullied to resource schools.

The revolting spectacle of both parties boasting of prudence in education expenditure continues. We should be in no doubt that the intention of whoever wins the general election is to cut public spending on schools in general and the education of the poor in particular. They are softening us up to accept the further extension of market principles into educa-

tion and the only result of this will be the increased polarisation of provision. Money will be attracted into wealthy areas where education will be increasingly turned into a saleable commodity and withdrawn from the poor, whose unskilled work will continue to provide the backbone of cheap and part-time labour. The agenda of both parties is an unashamed defence of the ugly face of capitalism.

Susan Davidson

### Newham Monitoring Project under attack

Newham Labour Council has just withdrawn £102,000 funding from the Newham Monitoring Project (NMP), active for 16 years in the fight against racist attacks in this East London borough.

NMP's campaigning work has retained an independence from the Labour Party which the latter has always found unacceptable. Now the council has latched on to a group of Asian businessmen and landlords as allies in its effort to destroy NMP. Masquerading behind the title 'Newham Unity', these forces are determined to ensure that anti-racism in Newham becomes a token gesture which upsets neither the police nor the interests of the local political establishment. FRFI sends its support to the NMP and demands that the cut in their funding be restored immediately.



Within three months there will be a general election. The electorate is going to be asked to vote Labour to get rid of the Tories. But can there be any real argument for voting for Tony Blair and what even *The Observer* describes as Labour's 'uncritical support for the free market and social authoritarianism'? Some argue that New Labour's positions are merely an attempt to win extra votes, and that if Labour becomes the next government, it will inevitably adopt more socialist policies. The opposite is true. Labour's policies express Labour's class standpoint – middle class privilege and arrogance. New Labour's purpose is to protect capital and the interests of the affluent minority. ROBERT CLOUGH argues a vote for Labour is a vote against the interests of the mass of the working class.

# NEW LABOUR don't vote for class enemies



Whilst at certain times capitalism can rule with a facade of consent, at other times, in periods of crisis for instance, it has to resort to brutality to defend its interests. This is what is happening today. Tony Blair and New Labour are gearing up to run the British state. Their support for 'social authoritarianism' is both a recognition of what they will have to do when they come to office and an expression of their willingness to do it. Hence Blair's 'zero tolerance' for the homeless is not an idle threat, let alone an isolated one. With 13 law and order bills before the current parliament, New Labour is openly collaborating with the Tories in establishing a police state.

Yet there are still those on the left who prevaricate on whether or not they will support the election of a New Labour government. The most notable example is the SWP, whose placards carrying the slogan 'Tony Blair – whose side are you on?' earned them a stinging rebuke from Arthur Scargill – if you don't know now, you never will. This is also true of Paul Foot when he complained in his *Guardian* column recently that 'the more New Labour makes concessions to Tory barbarism, the more barbarous the Tories will become'. Jack Straw needs no lessons on the subject from Michael Howard, nor Tony Blair from John Major: their barbarism is entirely home-grown because it arises from their class standpoint. It is impossible to offer

any support, however qualified, for New Labour, and remain a socialist at the same time.

## New Labour and the Police Bill

The provisions of the Police Bill provide an indication of how few rights will remain to us if the Tories and New Labour have their way. It establishes a National Crime Squad, and puts the National Criminal Intelligence Service on a statutory footing. It gives police the right to bug and burgle whomsoever they please. It will allow employers to demand criminal record certificates from prospective employees. The fact that New Labour now seeks to amend some of the bugging and burgling provisions should not blind us to the fact that they were originally in favour of them, and vehemently so.

It is clause 89 of the Police Bill that gives chief constables or their deputies powers to issue warrants to bug and enter private property, homes and offices and remove any material they choose in pursuit of 'serious crime'. The definition of 'serious crime' is extremely broad. It includes offences where an individual may expect a sentence of three years or more on first conviction, or those 'involving a large number of persons involved in pursuit of a common purpose'. This would of course include road protesters or anyone involved in organising a collective protest of any description. The powers allow the police to issue warrants when they think it likely to be of 'serious value

in the prevention or detection of serious crime'. Hence they would not be limited just to bugging and burgling property belonging to those they suspect of serious criminal activity – they could also bug and burgle their lawyers' property, or any journalist covering say a collective protest.

The Police Bill destroys the liberal idea that 'an Englishman's home is his castle'. With the recent attack on the right to silence by the Criminal Justice Act, two fundamental democratic rights have been destroyed. Yet New Labour, having reneged on the right to silence, initially expressed enthusiastic support for clause 89. Only under pressure from a front which included judges, SDP and Liberal peers, the *Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*, who all attacked these new powers, did Jack Straw back down. Until then, he had argued that the police have been doing all these things illegally since the passage of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. Never mind the fact that the Home Office guidance issued at that time was far more restrictive than those proposed in the current bill. Never mind that Labour never raised the issue of this illegality. Never mind the fact that the powers given to the police are even wider than those given to MI5 under the 1996 Security Services Act – these poor unfortunates, theoretically at least, have to get the Home Secretary's permission before they can do their bugging and burgling.

However, the climbdown is over detail and not of substance. Instead

of chief constables authorising warrants, Straw proposes six commissioners who would be High Court judges. Given that there are some 2,000 police bugging operations each year, the attention six people could pay to the purposes of these covert operations when they authorise them will be minimal, even if they were inclined to. At present, a normal warrant to enter and search premises can be obtained from one of 540 circuit judges; there are 96 High Court judges. By restricting the numbers who can authorise undercover activities Straw is ensuring that control will be nominal, and that the totalitarian substance will remain. In any case, Labour's amendments would still allow chief constables to authorise bugging and burgling in 'urgent' cases provided they get consent 'as soon as reasonably practicable' afterwards. The consequences are obvious: every case will be 'urgent', and the police will have carte blanche to do what they have been doing unofficially for many years.

Straw has also been forced to put forward an alternative to the definition of criminal activity that the Bill contains: bugging operations should only be allowed against 'criminal conduct by a large number of people in pursuit of an illegal activity.' Yet what is now not an illegal activity thanks to seven anti-trade union laws (supported by New Labour) or the attacks on squatting, raves and direct action contained in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (also supported by New Labour)?

## Round-up of Labour council cuts

Northampton (£28 million cuts) heads the list: 215 jobs to go including 120 social workers. This is followed by Hackney, a mere £22 million. The council has sent out letters to 1,000 manual workers informing them that their weekly hours are to be increased from 35 to 37, with a 12-month wage freeze and a cut in their sickness and injury benefit as icing on the cake. Islington has to cut between £13 and £16 million. Staff there too are being 'consulted': Chief Executive Leisha Fullick has written a letter to all employees saying 'if it does not prove possible to achieve by agreement those changes which the council finally decides on after full consultation, then the council currently envisages that it would terminate the contracts of those staff in

respect of whom no satisfactory agreement is reached'. In the meantime, fully-paid maternity leave is to be cut by 10 weeks, and all staff nursery places will be phased out over a four-year period. Leicester are next: 800 redundancies in an effort to claw back £10 million. Haringey is trying for £3 million cuts in part by axing an average £100,000 from each secondary school budget.

North of the border, things are just as bad. Argyll and Bute council is facing cuts of £8.3 million, with £3.5 million in education alone. The result of this is that up to 22 out of 88 schools face closure. On average council budgets will be cut by between six and eight per cent across Scotland. Borders council will lose 200 jobs, Perth and Kinross between 200 and 600, and Fife at least 400.

### Lambeth Council

Lambeth Council, run by a Lib-Lab coalition, is a by-word for incompetence, corruption and gangsterism. Two women

hostel managers at Tooting Bec Gardens hostel were suffered repeated sexual harassment, victimisation and even physical assault at the hands of their own manager. Despite reporting this, no action was taken, even when they alleged that drug dealing and prostitution were going on at the hostel. Later on, the two women found that they had lost their jobs in a 'restructuring' exercise. They took Lambeth to a tribunal and won their case. Lambeth offered an out-of-court settlement which also included a gagging clause. A subsequent internal inquiry decided not to take evidence from either woman, and took no action against the managers involved.

All this took place against a background of the privatisation of Council services which is enthusiastically supported by Labour. Personal data on 2,000 staff, including sickness and disciplinary records, have been passed to private companies tendering for cleaning contracts.



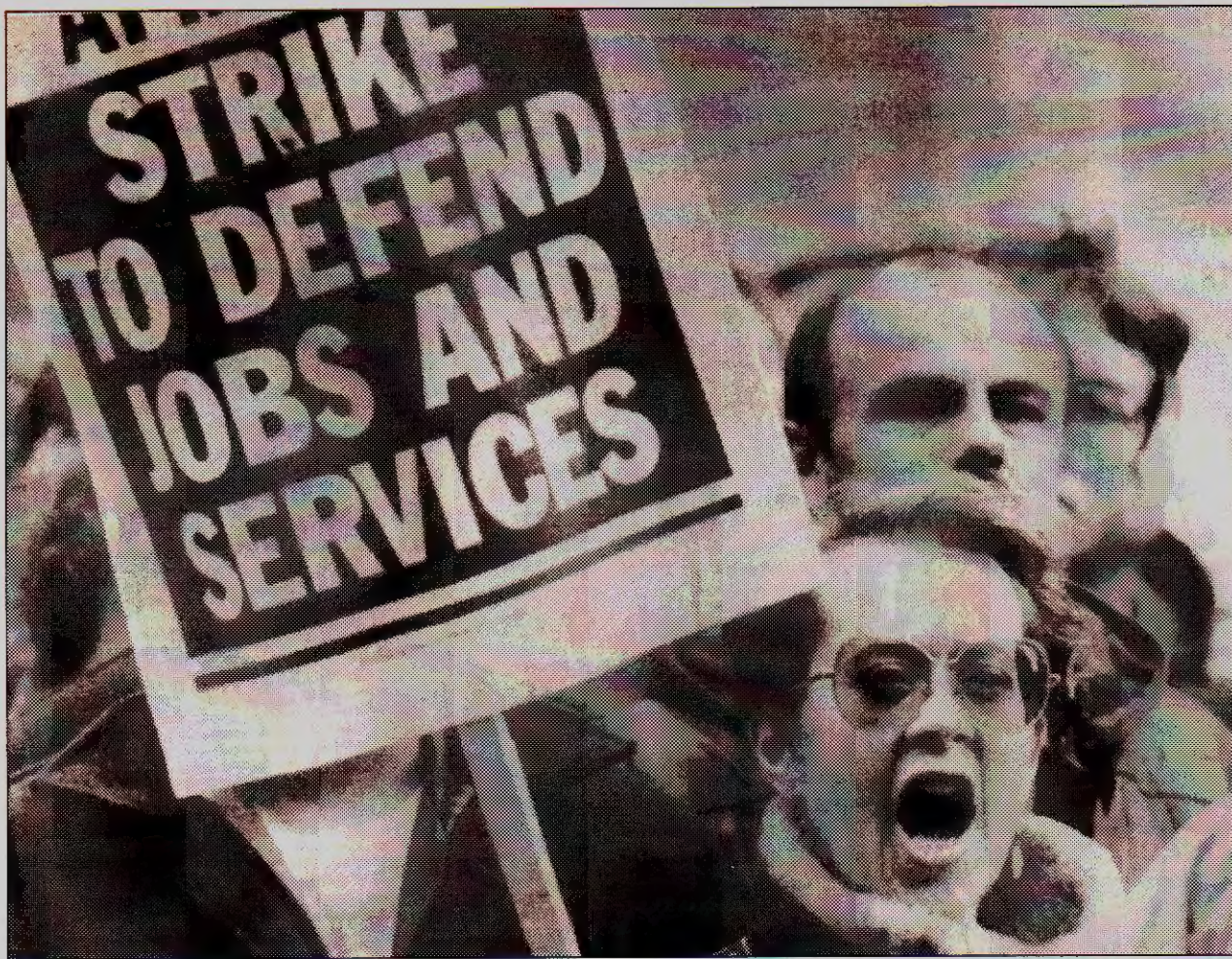
### Welwyn Hatfield

The Labour council, either through incompetence or worse, has just saddled local people with a bill for £48 million. This is the sum courts have awarded to Slough Estates, a property company which had sued the council for giving planning permission to another company to develop a second shopping complex near to one it had just constructed. The council's annual budget is only £9 million, and it is believed it will try to sell 4,000 council homes to raise the money to meet the debt. Local Labour leader Ray Little and others were said by the court to have

directed a policy of lies to induce Slough to build the shopping centre. Determined action by local residents who publicised the scandal and organised protest meetings forced 13 councillors (11 of them Labour) to resign their posts.

Newham Labour Council has 5,814 council homes unfit for habitation – more than any other council in London. In the case of two Zairean refugees, this means that they were lethal. Jean-Marie and Lusewo Lukombo died in their fume-filled maisonette on New Year's Day desperately trying to keep warm with the use of a portable gas-heater. The pair had repeatedly complained to the council about the lack of heating in their home – there was just one gas heater in a downstairs room. Council claims that they could have borrowed an electric heater for free are outrageous – the cost of running it would have been prohibitive. The couple leave a 10-month-old orphan girl, as well as two other young children whose mother died in Zaire four years ago.





### Criminal record certificates

Clause 5 of the Police Bill creates a system of criminal record certificates which employers can ask prospective workers to provide before offering them employment. Each certificate lasts three months, and will cost about £10 each and will spell out all unspent convictions. It is expected that some eight million people will have to apply for such certificates each year. Given that 34 per cent of all males under 30 have a criminal record of some kind, the potential for discrimination will be enormous.

Such a system will be particularly effective against socialists or other radical activists, many of whom will have convictions associated with protest activity, and who might be expected to be 'troublesome' trade unionists. Yet there has not been a peep of opposition from New Labour on this measure, despite the fact that the clause will require the unemployed to spend up to £40 each year in their search for work. However, we have returned to a Victorian era where the poor are divided into the deserving and undeserving, and anyone who has a criminal record, whatever its character, is clearly undeserving.

### Zero tolerance for poor and homeless

It is not just the proposals and policies that are oppressive, it is the language that they are dressed up in as well. It requires a thuggish arrogance

to attack the homeless in the pages of *The Big Issue*: Blair did so without turning a strand of his neatly coiffured hair. 'You wouldn't say it is satisfactory to leave them where they are', he replied when asked if he agreed with clearing beggars off the street. But surely it is not satisfactory to have people arrested for begging he was asked? 'Of course, unless they're doing something problematic for other people. I often drop my kids off at Kings Cross for them to take the tube and it is actually quite a frightening place for people'. Frightening for whom? For the middle class running some imaginary gauntlet as they send their children to their grant-maintained schools? Or frightening for the homeless, the children fleeing abuse at home only to fall into the clutches of pimps and drug pushers, or the mentally ill kicked out of hospital and dependent on the fiction of community care?

In this context, his response to the suggestion that a big problem is homeless people getting attacked by members of the public, not the other way around, is breathtaking in its duplicity: 'Obviously some people will interpret this in a way which is harsh and unpleasant, but I think the basic principle here is to say: yes, it is right to be intolerant of people homeless on the streets.' We would say that those 'some' people are absolutely right. Blair is just continuing down the path mapped out by Jack Straw in his attack on 'aggressive beggars, winos and squeegee merchants'.

### Maximum tolerance for the rich

Blair's intolerance for the poor does not extend to the rich, however. He has now confirmed that a Labour government will not raise the 40 per cent top rate of tax, not even for those earning £100,000 or more as some had suggested. Gordon Brown has gone a step further: there will be no increase in such tax rates during the entire lifetime of the next Labour government, and he has also confirmed he supports the Tories' spending plans for the next two years. Yet the gain from tax handouts that such people have received under the Tories amounts to £43,000 per annum.

The richest one per cent of the population now owns 17 per cent of private wealth, receiving an average £37,960pa in unearned income on top of their salaries. Meanwhile two million children are undernourished, whilst the backlog of repairs on the 3.7 million houses remaining in council ownership amounts to £10.5 billion. The poorest 50 per cent of the population owns just 7 per cent of private wealth; the poorest 10 per cent have seen a fall in weekly income of £13 over the last 20 years.

The social reality that these figures express explains why New Labour is supporting every move to strengthen state power: sooner or later the well of underlying resentment will explode into open rebellion. Do not suppose that a Labour government will hesitate to unleash the forces of oppression whose build-up it has so diligently supported over the past few years. ■



Blair - intolerant of the homeless

### more zero tolerance

A recent survey reported in the *Sunday Mirror* revealed that there are - wait for it - 237 millionaires amongst the 651 MPs at Westminster. 12 out of the 23 cabinet ministers are amongst their number, as are 7 Labour MPs. These include Geoffrey Robinson, worth £25 million, and Greville Janner, a mere pauper at £4.5 million. No wonder they all have zero tolerance for tax increases!

In 1649, Parliament chopped off Charles I's head. In 1997, John Prescott more modestly said he was not a monarchist. Even this is too radical for Labour. Within hours someone at Blair's office had issued a rebuttal saying 'The Labour Party believes in the constitutional monarchy.' Zero tolerance for republicanism, it seems.

*The Observer* has revealed a list of senior businessmen who have a part-time job advising Tony Blair about how to be intolerant. The companies they work for are a roll-call of British multinationals. There is Robert Ayling (British Airways), Dennis Stevenson (Chair-designate of the Pearsons publishing group), Niall Fitzgerald (Chair, Unilever) and David Sainsbury (Chair, the family firm). Given the record of the last two companies in organising the eco-destruction of third world countries to produce tasty morsels for the British middle class we need not expect ecology to be an issue high on the concerns of Labour. Meanwhile another group of businessmen are set to endorse the Social Chapter, a national minimum wage and an extra annual spend on education and training of £3.5 billion. Who are they? GEC managing director George Simpson and British Aerospace chair Bob Bauman. Their companies are of course the linchpins of the British arms industry. Mind you, with Blair's zero tolerance for any extra state expenditure they seem to be slightly too left-wing for his taste.

## A vote for Labour is...

☐ A vote for Trident. 'A new Labour government will retain Trident', last year's Manifesto said, and Blair has said he would be prepared to press the button. Only after there is 'verified progress' towards the elimination of nuclear weapons would New Labour 'ensure British nuclear weapons are included in such negotiations'.

☐ A vote to sell weapons of mass destruction to barbarous regimes through the world. This includes the continuing sale of Hawk fighter-bombers to Indonesia. But then this is an example of continuity: it was the last Labour government which sold the first batch of Hawks to the Suharto regime, and these were used in the genocidal war against the people of East Timor.

☐ A vote to keep working class pensioners in poverty. New Labour will not restore the link between the level of the state pension and the rise in earnings. Breaking this link has cost single pensioners £20.30 per week since 1980, and couples £33.00.

☐ A vote to keep the Job Seeker's Allowance. Although officially 'under review', this is code for keeping it. New Labour in government will target social security for cuts; its high-profile local government campaigns against 'benefit fraud' are a foretaste of the oppressive regime it will institute against claimants.

☐ A vote to retain Tory trade union legislation: 'The key elements of the trade union legislation of the 1980s - on ballots, picketing and industrial action - will stay'.

☐ A vote for minimal employment rights. New Labour will not reduce the qualifying period for minimal rights at work to the old level of six months, so that those who need a union most - those who have been employed less than two years - will still be sacked for union activities regardless.

☐ A vote to retain selection in education - 'We will not close good schools' - whether they be grant-maintained or grammar schools. 'The future of remaining grammar schools is up to the parents affected' - and since when have the middle class ever voted to give up any of their privileges?

☐ A vote to continue moves to privatise the NHS through the Private Finance Initiative, and a vote to retain GP fundholding in all but name.

☐ A vote to retain the Criminal Justice Act.

☐ A vote to retain the current immigration laws and a vote for racism. Again, Labour have abstained as the Asylum Bill has passed through Parliament, confining themselves to minor amendments which would make it an even more reactionary piece of legislation.

☐ A vote to continue the British military occupation of the North of Ireland. 'We have supported the present government strongly in the Northern Ireland peace process. We will continue to do so.' New Labour have been true to their word: their complicity with the government in attempting to isolate the Republican movement over the last two and a half years has been unwavering.

(all quotes from the last year's Manifesto document)

### Who is going to vote?

Not the youth, it seems. A recent survey found that 86 per cent of black youth in the age range 18 to 25 reckon they are unlikely to vote in the general election. The figure falls to 60 per cent for white youth - but that still means the majority are not going to place their cross in any box. A nameless Labour Party spokeswoman said it was 'very worrying that such a large section of the electorate do not take an interest in how the country is run'. It seems like the youth are the ones with some zero tolerance - for being forced to decide which millionaire will represent them for the next five years!

### Then and now...

#### Aberfan: 30 years on

On 21 October 1966, a slag heap slipped down a mountain in Aberfan, south Wales and buried the Panteglas primary school, killing 116 children and 28 adults. Responsibility for the disaster lay firmly with the National Coal Board (NCB), which had ignored local warnings about the presence of two streams which would make the tip unstable. Official documents just released under the 30-year rule reveal how the Labour Government of the day connived with the head of the NCB, Sir Alf Robens, to deny any justice to the bereaved families.

Under Robens's direction, the NCB initially offered £50 compensation per bereaved family; its final offer was just £500. It then refused to pay for the removal of other waste tips which still loomed over the village. On his arrival at the disaster scene (postponed until the day after the tragedy so that he could go



Aberfan - testament to Old Labour

ahead with his inauguration as Chancellor of Surrey University), Robens lied about the cause of the landslide, blaming it on an 'unknown spring'. He maintained this fiction throughout the inquiry until the very end. The report of the inquiry laid the blame at the door of the NCB: 'The Aberfan disaster is a terrifying tale of bungling ineptitude by many men charged with tasks for which they were totally unfitted... and of a total lack of direction from above.' It accused Robens of giving

inconsistent answers under cross examination. Harold Wilson called the report 'devastating'. But Robens refused to resign, insisting the government express full confidence in him. In September 1967, the government caved in and allowed him to serve the rest of his term. He was then appointed to chair a review of health and safety at work (which decided that negligence of health and safety should not be a criminal offence).

Two slagheaps still remained over the village. The NCB refused to pay for their removal, insisting the cost of £3 million was too much. They rejected an alternative offer of £660,000 from a private company. The Labour Treasury also refused to pay. For two years the wrangling continued, until in the end the disaster fund set up to aid the devastated village and its inhabitants was forced to shell out £150,000 towards the final cost of £850,000, with the NCB and the Treasury splitting the rest.

There was never an apology from the NCB.



TREVOR RAYNE

The strikes and protests in South Korea give the lie to the triumphalism of capitalism; lines of riot police, teargas clouds and politicians' crude threats mean just one thing: capitalism is in crisis.

They were called the Asian Tigers or 'flying geese', with Japan at their head, effortlessly passing production records, on their way to achieve half the world's economic growth by the year 2000 or so the World Bank said. We were on the verge of the 'Pacific century'. As the world watched the battles in Seoul and South Korea's other major cities, the Tokyo stock market fell 21% during December and January. Estimates for Japanese economic growth over the coming year dropped to 1.9%, the lowest since World War Two. The head of the flock was coming down to earth with a bump.

In the vocabulary of globalisation South Korea, like the other Tigers, meant vitality, it symbolised the continuing energy of capitalism: a valuable antidote to the symptoms of decay seeping through the older imperialist countries. Now the same laws that govern capitalist production wherever it is reassert themselves to undo the 'Asian miracle'.

Much of the media presented the South Korean workers as trying to maintain traditions of lifelong employment, as though they had been pampered too long. South Korea has not changed its labour legislation in 43 years, most of that time under military dictatorship. This legislation permits only one union per work-

## SOUTH KOREA



### An illusion shattered

place, restricts the ability to organise across workplaces, forbids solidarity action with fellow employees in dispute and results in company-sponsored unions. To this was added new legislation put through parliament before dawn on 26 December while the opposition was absent. Companies would henceforth have greater liberty to sack workers, hire temporary staff to break strikes, change working

conditions at will and extend the working day. Repressive powers given to the secret police were also strengthened allowing the removal of any left wing or person suspected of North Korean sympathies. This took place against a background of no welfare provision for the unemployed and looming redundancies.

The illegal Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) which claims 500,000 affiliates mobilised most of them and with militant actions by workers and students on the streets won a retreat from the Korean government. After four weeks of strikes and confrontations, with \$3 billion in lost production among the monopolies that dominate Korea's economy, President Kim Young Sam sent his labour 'reforms' back to parliament for further debate and agreed to reconsider the national security powers. He said that the KCTU should be legalised, but hoped that in exchange the unions would recognise the need for firms to sack staff.

South Korea's rulers will not long hold off their attack on the working class, and they have understood the need to integrate at least sections of the militant union leadership if they are to be effective. South Korea is caught in the midst of a massive overproduction of capital which is driving down profit rates and intensifying competition for markets and resources throughout East Asia and the world.

The US magazine *Business Week* reports 'Overcapacity looms in such key areas as petrochemicals, consumer ap-

pliances, passenger cars and chips'... 'Once Samsung and Hyundai [South Korean multinationals] get into petrochemicals they will overbuild like they do in autos. They're going to crash the world market', one consultant predicted. 'To compete with European and US companies we need to expand' responded Samsung's planning manager. The same story applies to cars and microchips. Vietnam, with a domestic car market of under 10,000, has authorised the construction of eleven assembly plants. In India over fifteen auto investments are approved. Thailand is to double its car output in five years and so on; the boss of Chrysler predicts a 'bloodbath'. South Korea is a major producer of memory chips for the likes of Intel, Motorola and Texas Instruments. Such chips have fallen 82% in price over the past year. Nevertheless, Taiwan is to go ahead with the production of a dozen new silicon-wafer plants; 'The world cannot absorb this much capacity'.

With the East Asian El Dorado so overworked it is not surprising to find South Korean capital seeking profitable outlets in Europe. Samsung now has eleven production plants in Europe. Lucky Gold Star and Daewoo, whose overseas production is currently 3% and 8% of total output respectively, intend to raise the ratios to 45% and 60% by the year 2000! This is the dynamic South Korean economy replicating the pattern of decaying British capital, with investment desperate for new outlets but finding fewer opportunities, forcing more intense competition and driving down the conditions of workers in a bid to restore profits. The South Korean workers will have need of the lessons they have recently learned.

## Steve Biko

CAROL BRICKLEY

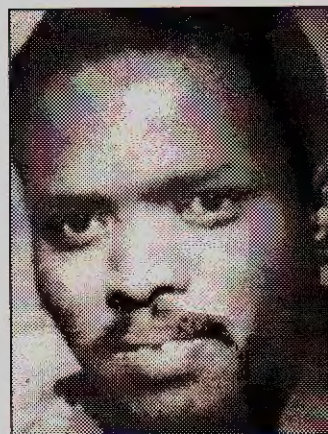
On 12 September 1997 it will be 20 years since Black Consciousness leader Steve Bantu Biko was murdered in detention in South Africa, aged 30. On 28 January it was announced that five policemen who admitted killing him are seeking amnesty through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up by Nelson Mandela's government to promote 'reconciliation' between the different communities. In exchange for confessions to crimes carried out under Apartheid, the Commission, led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, has the power to grant amnesty. Its supporters argue that crimes were committed on all sides; that the Truth Commission will promote harmony; and that without amnesty provisions the truth about many of the crimes will never be discovered.

These provisions have been challenged by some relatives of murdered anti-apartheid activists, including Steve Biko's family who have been prominent amongst them. They have good reasons for challenging a set-up which protects murderers and those who implemented a policy of mass murder.

There is, in fact, little to discover about Steve Biko's murder. He was arrested in Port Elizabeth, beaten and tortured in detention as a result of which he suffered severe brain damage. He was then transported more than 700 miles, naked in the back of a police van, to Pretoria prison where he died. He received no medical help. Steve Biko was murdered because the regime was frightened of his movement and his popularity.

After his murder, the regime tried to cover up. Kruger announced that Biko had died of hunger strike: 'His death leaves me cold'. The police denied beating him. The inquest and the medical examiner tried to smother the truth. One month after his death, 19 Black Consciousness organisations and two newspapers were banned. But the truth did emerge. For 20 years everyone has known that Biko was murdered in deten-



tion. All that was needed then and is still needed now, is a investigation into who gave the orders to kill him.

The 'confessing' policemen now no doubt living on generous pensions, knew they were committing murder. They also know who it was who ordered them to do it.

These 'confessions' will be a real test for the Truth Commission. As a result of the 1976 Soweto Uprising more than 1,000 young people were shot dead and thousands more maimed. It was out of this struggle that the Black Consciousness Movement emerged. The regime responded with total repression: 10,000 were detained, of whom many died. The regime's cynicism is clear from the list of those who died and the causes given for the deaths. This is just a sample:

Mapetla Mohapi: suicide by hanging; Luke Mazwembe: suicide by hanging; Dumisani Mbatha: unknown illness; Fenuel Mogatus: suffocation; Jacob Mashabane: suicide by hanging; Edward Mzolo: undisclosed; Ernest Mankasela: suicide by hanging; Thabane Mosala: internal bleeding; Twinefene Joyi: undisclosed; Wellington Tshazibane: suicide by hanging; George Botha: fell stairs down stairwell; Nabaot Ntshunsa: suicide by hanging; Lawrence Ndzanga: natural causes; Mathews Mabelane: fell out of tenth floor window...

These deaths were not accidents, nor the result of 'robustness'; they were accomplished with the sick bravura of Hitler's 'Final Solution'. It should not be Biko's family alone who demand justice. History demands it.

## Ireland: British repression continues

SARAH BOND

As 1997 opened, our rulers had only one New Year's resolution in relation to Ireland: to maintain its partition, suppressing with violence the Republican movement which fights for its unification.

What Sinn Fein has dubbed the 'some-party talks' falter on. Britain's Patrick Mayhew maintains the fiction that the Loyalist ceasefire holds, despite increasing sectarian attacks, in order to justify the continued inclusion of the Loyalist death-squads' political parties and thereby leave Sinn Fein isolated. But for this tactic to work, the talks have to hold out the hope of change for Nationalists. Such hopes were wiped out by events at Drumcree and in Derry, during last summer's Orange marching season: when the Loyalists displayed their supremacist sectarianism they received the full backing of the RUC and British state; when Nationalists peacefully protested, they were attacked, leaving many wounded and one dead. The middle ground that the British state hoped to create between the marginally more moderate Loyalism of David Trimble's Official Unionists and the middle class Nationalists of the SDLP rapidly disappeared.

In its New Year message, the IRA responded by reaffirming its 'steadfast commitment to our republican objectives... [which]



remains the reunification of our country'. 'We approach the year ahead unified, confident and steadfast in our commitment to succeed.' It illustrated the point in December and January by significantly stepping up attacks on British and Loyalist forces in the occupied north.

Meanwhile, the forces of the sectarian state, official and unofficial, have increased their campaign of indiscriminate terror against Nationalist communities. Catholic churches and schools have been attacked across the Six Counties. Ballyrangan Chapel in County Down was attacked on Christmas morning. Also in County Down, 18 Catholic graves were desecrated. In December, a Catholic primary school and chapel were firebombed. Firebombings of nationalist homes continued in a number of areas. In Waterside, three homes were firebombed in just one week in January.

Loyalist death squads have also tried to kill Republican activists. Sinn Fein's Liam Duffy found a car bomb under his car on 28 December. A similar attempt was made on the life of Eddie Copeland, who has survived other attacks, including a shooting by a British soldier who was convicted of attempted murder as a result. Copeland's father was killed by a British soldier in 1971.

An official letter from David Trimble's office sought to defend Loyalist violence, saying that 'they bomb, shoot and murder people to see democracy restored'. Another Loyalist politician, councillor Jim Rodgers, called for more repressive measures against the Nationalist movement, commenting that if Loyalist warnings had been heeded in the 1970s, 'there would have been no need for the UDA and UVF.'

RUC and British army

harassment of Nationalists has continued. A number of leading Sinn Fein activists were arrested or stopped and held by the RUC over Christmas and then released without charge, including Gerry Adams, Frankie Molloy, Mitchel McLaughlin, Martin McGuinness, Pat Doherty and Gerry Kelly. There was also an increase in RUC raids across nationalist areas in West Belfast. The home of Liz McGinn and her four children was all but demolished, with walls and ceilings completely knocked through. Needless to say, nothing was found. In another raid, pregnant Anne Gray was held under armed guard and denied access to a doctor while RUC men flooded her home after they broke water pipes both upstairs and downstairs. They also smashed her TV, chairs, bath panels and a toilet seat. When Mrs Gray called her doctor, local SDLP MP Joe Hendron, she was told by his surgery to phone an RUC barracks! Dr Hendron eventually turned up at her home three days later.

John Major commented last year, 'As far as I am concerned, Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, just like Surrey.' With a 1997 election looming, we can be sure that any future British government, Tory or Labour, will rely upon the repression and intimidation of Nationalists to keep it that way.

## Peru: revolutionaries upset ruling class Christmas celebrations

On 18 December 1996, guerrilla units from the Peruvian Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) stormed the Japanese ambassador's residence and took some 490 international diplomats, politicians and industrialists hostage.

The media transformed the MRTA operation into an entertainment spectacle centring on the fate of the hostages. The MRTA's message was dismissed as 'an ideology of the past'. In fact, the operation was a response to the bitter and brutal present that the Fujimori dictatorship is imposing on the Peruvian people with the full support of international capital. A

guerrilla representative state. 'In a situation of violence and increased repression, being exerted by the Peruvian authorities against political prisoners, the military action of the MRTA has two goals: 1) the release of MRTA prisoners, as well as those prisoners falsely accused of being MRTA militants; 2) publicise the struggle against neo-liberalism, which the Peruvian regime is practising.'

The siege continues some days later. Many of the hostages have been released and the Peruvian military is preparing for military assault on the guerrillas. Whatever the outcome FR extends its solidarity to the MRTA.





## Diary of the No Pasaran! Brigade



'I went out earlier than the other brigadistas... my welcome in Ciego was fantastic. In UJC discos, DJs would announce the impending arrival of "our friends from Britain, who brought over disco equipment last year and will arrive next week with mobile disco equipment." Everybody was excited.'

### 28 DECEMBER - DAY 1

'We arrived at Disco Amigos, the disco Rock around the Blockade had helped to set up last year, three hours late... the sound equipment we'd brought with us had failed to get unloaded at Camaguey, our bus to Ciego had killed a cow on the dark country roads... yet at 2am unbelievably cheerful and hospitable families were still waiting to welcome us and take 21 tired but exhilarated brigadistas back to their homes for the next ten days.'

### 29 DECEMBER - DAY 2

'Our first visit was to the family doctor, discussing healthcare in Britain in comparison with Cuba. This doctor called on my family several times over the next two weeks, as much for a chat as to visit the baby who had been ill. He was also qualified in herbal and other traditional medicines which, in the special period, have become an important resource to be used in conjunction with conventional medicine.'

'I asked a couple of members of the Revolutionary National Police why they carried guns. "To make people feel secure from any US attacks. But in 17 years as a policeman, I've never had to unbutton the holster." They told me they hardly ever had to make an arrest. The biggest problem they faced was the occasional Cuban getting drunk and getting into a fight. Was racism a problem? "There are more black police than white." What did they think of Fidel? "He is like our father."'



# CUBA VIVE!

## Defending socialism in Cuba

At the end of December, Rock around the Blockade's work over the last year culminated in taking a brigade of 21 young people – the No Pasaran! brigade – to Cuba, taking with us equipment for a mobile disco requested by the Union of Young Communists (UJC) of Ciego de Avila.

Rock around the Blockade was set up in 1995 by the Revolutionary Communist Group to support the defence of socialism and linking work in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution with the goal of building a socialist movement here in Britain.

### The special period: economic gains and risks

When the USSR and the socialist bloc collapsed between 1989 and 1991, Cuba lost over 80% of its trade. Between 1989 and 1994, GDP fell by 34%; between 1989 and 1992, imports fell by 75%. In the face of this economic crisis, the Cuban government decided that the gains of the Revolution would be defended at all costs. The economic changes of the last two years – the legalisation of the dollar economy, the growth of joint ventures with foreign capital, self-employment, the increase in tourism, for example – were introduced with this goal in mind.

In sharp contrast to the cuts and ever-increasing attacks on the working class that are capitalism's response to its economic crisis, Cuba took a firm stand in the interests of its people. No hospitals or schools were closed or public services lost, even at the height of the Special Period, and pensions and benefits were maintained.

Today, in spite of continuing shortages, an increased public health budget means that by the end of 1997, the number of beds in hospitals and polyclinics will have increased by 4,400, and Cuba expects in 1997 to achieve a figure of one doctor per 178 inhabitants and one dentist for every 1,150. Infant mortality in 1996 fell to 7.9 per 1,000 live births from 9.4 in 1995. We visited a hospital, schools, a child care centre and old people's home: time and time again we were struck by the quality of care and the pride of those involved in the achievements of their Revolution.

1996 saw Cuba's GDP rise by 7.8%, well above the 5% forecast at the beginning of the year, and in spite of losses caused by Hurricane Lili. Sugar production increased, as did production of root vegetables, rice, tobacco, oil refining and nickel, with an increase by 50% of the net contributions from tourism – with a record million-plus visitors to Cuba this year – to the national economy. Foreign investment rose by 54%, in spite of the Helms-Burton Act meaning the withdrawal of some companies from, for example, investment in the sugar industry. Average salaries rose from 190 to 203 pesos per month, and the value of the peso in relation to the dollar has risen six-fold over the last two years. Meanwhile, food available on the farmers' markets (private markets which enable Cubans to supplement the state ration) increased and prices fell.



Children at the Pioneers Palace, Ciego de Avila

Nevertheless, severe hardships remain. Even with record increases in production in some sectors, the food supply is still nowhere near pre-1989 levels. Meat production is about half what it was before the Special Period, due mainly to shortages of animal feed; fewer than 1.2bn eggs were produced in 1996, compared to 2.7bn in 1989. The target of 400m litres of milk achieved in 1996 compares to one billion previously. To continue to ensure, for example, that every child under seven gets a litre of milk a day means a continuing need for hard currency to buy milk powder on the world market, and hence a continuing need to rely on and expand the economic reforms of the past two years.

As the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party itself has warned, these changes are not without political and social risks. The legalisation of dollars has undoubtedly meant the growth of inequality. Only about one in four Cubans has direct access to dollars – whether from family in the US, from work in joint enterprises or contact with tourists – and therefore access to a more privileged lifestyle. We noted a definite increase in the number of dollar shops in Ciego and although the peso shops are now better-stocked with goods than, say, a year ago, they remain extremely expensive for the average Cuban.

Prostitution and crime, associated with the growth in tourism, are on the increase. Financial self-management of enterprises, while increasing efficiency, can sap collective consciousness – as can self-employment. And, in spite of economic improvements, the continuing hardships can breed resentment and dissatisfaction. It is against this backdrop that the vanguard and mass organisations of the people we met in Cuba have to work to preserve the revolutionary commitment of the country.

### Working with the people

We were privileged to meet with a wide range of organisations at a provincial and grassroots level and be able to frankly raise these concerns, in a comradely spirit. The trade union organisation, the CTC, explained to us how in joint ventures, Cuban labour laws apply. If capitalists reject them, there is no negotiation – they do not accept them into joint enterprises. Their work is being adapted to ensure that 'jobs are protected and human resources well used'. No enterprise can be changed or job lost without union involvement, and re-employment is guaranteed by the union if there are job losses. Structures of local democracy like the grassroots CDRs attempt to ensure that grievances can be raised in a collective fashion and problems overcome through organisation.

Although the luxurious conditions that exist for tourists undoubtedly rankle with many Cubans, as a reporter for *Granma Internacional* who accompanied us on our visit to a hotel (built in record time) accepted, the vast majority understand the necessity for the tourist industry and the hard currency it brings in. The construction workers involved in building the hotel were the first to stay in it – for a free holiday – and rooms are set aside for vanguard workers and students. Tips at the hotel are collectivised, and a percentage donated to the local health institutions.

At the cooperative farm we visited, the workers not only meet their quota of production for the state, but raise revenue by exporting citrus fruit. Profits are not only shared among the workers but ploughed back into the community, into supporting the local school, for example. The leaders of the cooperative, previously small farmers, insisted that the agricultural reforms had made them more efficient, more productive and hence better able to support the revolution.

### Working with the youth

The UJC, perhaps more than any other organisation, is at the forefront of defending the socialist nature of the Revolution. From its work with the tiniest children in the Jose Marti Pioneers right up to university level, the UJC organises resources, educates and unites the youth of Cuba. In Havana, we visited the UJC's Malecon projects, aimed at providing recreation for young people in a 'healthy and collective way', as the UJC workers explained: an alternative to the culture of drugs, prostitution and crime which tourism in the capital city encourages. They also know if they do not organise the youth, the forces of reaction will: churches are already providing discos for young people, and luring them to their services with gifts of cooking oil and soap. It is for this reason that our donation of a mobile disco, small gesture though it seems, has a vital importance for the UJC of Ciego.

Over the last year, their membership has grown and their internal organisation improved – as shown by the prize they received as the best UJC of all the small provinces in Cuba. They see their work as both practical and ideological. They work to solve the problems that confront the country by mobilising young people into construction and agriculture, explain the need to increase production and efficiency in all sectors and organise facilities for the youth. However, the shortages of the Special Period in Cuba have meant a dearth of recreational facilities for young people.

Last year, Rock around the Blockade took a 30-strong brigade to Cuba and sound equipment that enabled the UJC to set up the Disco Amigos in the provincial capital of Ciego. That, they told us, encouraged young people to come to them. This year's donation will allow them to go out to the youth of Cuba, mobilising and uniting UJC members and non-members alike in the defence of socialism and the gains of the Revolution. One of the highlights of the inauguration of the disco for Elio Rodriguez, ideological secretary of the Ciego UJC, was the moment when ten thousand voices – members and non-members alike – cheered the UJC as the disco opened. The bus, which will carry the names of the UJC and the brigade, will give them an even higher profile.

It was important too, for the UJC, that we were able to tell the Cubans we met about conditions in Britain for the poor, for the working class. As important to us was the experience we were able to give young people from Britain of the possibilities that socialism creates for confronting those conditions and for creating a better society. The World Festival of Youth and Students, to be held in Cuba this summer (see box on p8/9) will allow this relationship to flourish. It is by building a socialist movement in Britain that we will best defend socialism in Cuba. That must be our aim as we begin the work of building a delegation from Britain to attend the Festival.

Hannah Caller and Cat Wiener



## 30 DECEMBER – DAY 3

A black and white photograph of a train car, likely a passenger car, with a large banner wrapped around its side. The banner features the text "Defend Cuba" and "Defend" in large, bold letters. There is also a circular logo on the banner that appears to contain a portrait of a person. The train is moving along tracks, and the background is slightly blurred.

31 DECEMBER – DAY 4

1 JANUARY – DAY 5: ANNIVERSARY OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

2 JANUARY – DAY 6

*Michael Taylor*



women to be portrayed for their intellect and their potential, and not for their bodies.'

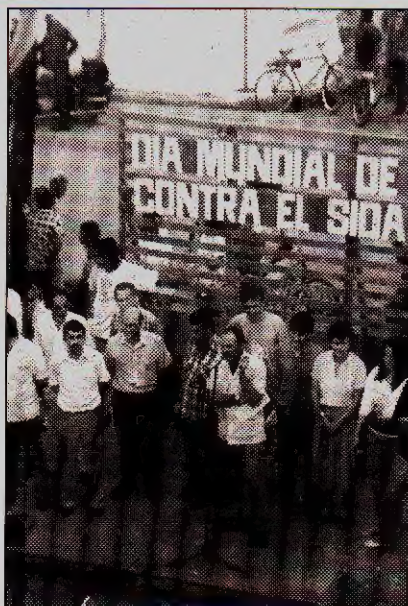
### Women in the domestic sphere

'You asked about household chores and the Family Code [which enshrines in law, amongst other things, men's shared responsibility for domestic work and which the FMC was instrumental in drawing up]. Well, it is not easy to change people's minds after thousands of years. The new generation of men is better, but still thousands of women work and have double tasks. What we say is we are not asking men to help out as a favour – we want them to share equally. They eat too, they want to sleep in a clean bed as much as women do, they want to wear clean clothes like women do! There must be recognition of equal needs. They must share the responsibility, not help. That fact is emphasised in education from a very young age.

'We are involved in educating the new generation. We run programmes for parents-to-be, and an important area of work is in sex education and AIDS prevention for both young men and women. The level of teenage pregnancy in Cuba is high, but there are indications that we are having some success – for example, that more Cuban men are beginning to accept the need to use condoms! While abortion is a woman's right, we try to educate people so that it is not used as a method of family planning or contraception. Abortion is free and available on demand. Most abortions are performed at six to eight weeks, although in the case of foetal abnormality, it may be later, say, 20 weeks. In Cuba, we aim to have children that are wanted.

'With the divorce rate rising in Cuba, the FMC is very involved with single mothers. We help ensure that the women find day care centres and schooling for the children and jobs for themselves. By law, the father has financial obligations to the child after a divorce, and he must be aware of his responsibilities. The FMC intervenes if the father is not fulfilling his role. If a divorced woman is not working, the father must pay any costs for the child's upbringing and for the mother. The FMC is there to support women. In this vital work, we have the unstinting support of Fidel Castro and the Cuban government.'

Hannah Caller



## World Aids Day Ciego de Avila

World Aids Day, 1 December 1996, in Ciego de Avila. 3,000 people came to hear Ernesto Rene Salcedo Rolma speak at a rally and musical event organised by the UJC. Ernesto is the director of the Centre for the Promotion of Health Education for the province of Ciego de Avila. Out of a population of 400,000 in the province, there are 25 people with HIV.

Brigadistas visited the AIDS sanatorium in Havana and interviewed Jorge Perez, the director, who told them of the current trials on 24 volunteers for a vaccine for the virus. The patients live in 150 houses built in extensive grounds, surrounded by palm trees and excellent facilities and are free to visit and live with their families if they wish. Figures for October give a total of 1,461 Cubans who are HIV+. Transmission through heterosexual contact accounts for 47.6% of cases, homosexual contact for 46.5%. Almost the entire population has been voluntarily tested. Research and treatment for the virus have been hampered by the US blockade – drugs and equipment cost three times as much as if they were available via the USA. Jorge Perez told us that a US medical research team who visited Cuba as part of a study into the efficacy of protease inhibitors applied to the US Treasury Department for funds to conduct trials in Cuba: they were refused and fined \$100,000.

Richard Roques

The next issue of FRFI will carry an extensive article on AIDS treatment in Cuba and full interview with Jorge Perez.

### GRACIAS A TODOS

Todos los participantes de la brigada No Pasaran! ofrecemos nuestras gracias calurosas a todos los cubanos que nos dieron inspiracion, amor y camaraderia durante nuestro tiempo en Cuba. En particular: el departamento de relaciones internacionales de la UJC; el buro provincial de la UJC de Ciego de Avila; y todas las familias avilenas que nos dieron una hospitalidad tan calurosa. Nunca les olvidaremos.

# Brigade meets CTC

A political highlight of the No Pasaran! brigade was the meeting with members of the Ciego de Avila provincial committee of the CTC (Cuban federation of trade unions). In Cuba around 99 per cent of workers are members of trade unions. There is one union for each sector – ie one union for education workers, one for sugar workers, one for all health workers – and all workers participate in the unions at their workplace, directly electing their representatives there. Union representatives receive the same wages as the workers, they don't have private cars and they live in the same type of houses as workers. They do not get privileges – they face the same problems as the whole of the working class.

The CTC members told us about their congress (held in April 1996) which took a year to prepare. All the workers took part in discussing the congress, giving them the opportunity to instruct their delegates to raise the issues that concerned them. This congress had to deal with difficult problems – the effects of the Special Period on the Cuban working class as a whole and the economic and political measures taken by the government to confront the difficulties. The main task of the unions was the fight for efficiency, whilst ensuring that no-one is left to fend for themselves. The CTC doesn't take a narrow view of the working class: it defends the whole working class, and in the special period the CTC has ensured that pensions haven't been cut, pregnant women's allowances haven't been reduced and compensation payments have remained the same.

At the workplace, there can be no changes in the enterprise without

CTC involvement. If a factory has to close or cut down its work due to shortages caused by the Special Period, the CTC guarantees the worker receives payment and finds alternative work. In dealing with foreign capitalists in joint ventures, the government and CTC, not the capitalists, are the ones who decide who to employ and what wages they receive. All foreign capitalists have to abide by Cuban laws, including the labour laws.

When the government proposes new laws, such as taxation, the proposals are discussed by the workers and given back to the government with their recommendations, and the necessary amendments are made.

The CTC's political work in the present period is to explain to the workers, especially in joint ventures, the necessity of working efficiently to produce better results because, although one half of the profits go to the foreign capitalists, the other half goes to the Cuban state to preserve the gains of the revolution in healthcare, education, pensions etc for everyone, rather than face the alternative that the rest of Latin America faces.

The CTC is an independent organisation which recognises the leading role of the Cuban Communist Party. The CTC sees its role as one of uniting all the working class to preserve the gains of socialism for everyone.

Continuing the discussion informally afterwards, brigadistas told the CTC members about the experiences of the Hillingdon women and the Liverpool dockers and their treatment by their unions. They replied that before the revolution the unions in Cuba were like those and, that they never want to return to such conditions.

David Howarth

## Diary of the No Pasaran! Brigade

### 3 JANUARY – DAY 7

'We witnessed the Cuban people's enthusiasm for sport when brigadistas played some young Cubans at football. The overall fitness of the Cubans in the scorching heat was the decisive factor in their 7-0 win!'

'That evening members of the Provincial Assembly of Poder Popular, which involves all the people of Cuba in the democratic decision-making process, answered our many questions. A brigadista spoke about his own experience of local government in Scotland, where his local councillor supported the closure of his daughter's school.'

### 4 JANUARY – DAY 8



'Showing us round a tourist centre in Cayo Coco that demonstrates the life of charcoal burners before 1959, the guide spoke with pride both of the heritage of Cuban culture and also of the achievements of the Revolution.'

'The afternoon, we spent on the beach, swimming in the bright turquoise sea, before a brigade meeting held sitting on the sand beneath the setting sun.'

### 5 JANUARY – DAY 9

'We helped to pick out sugar cane from the leaves the combine harvester left in its wake. We chewed on raw sugar cane while the workers and a representative from the Communist Party answered our questions. We then watched the refining process, amidst the deafening noise of machinery. Inspiring slogans were painted at the entrance; a siren sounded to indicate targets were being met. The factory's furnaces are powered by the waste from the refining process.'

'Brigadistas and Cubans crowded into the UJC office for an RCG meeting entitled 'Defending socialism in Cuba, building socialism in Britain.' We talked about our own experiences of life in Britain – of what education for working class children really means, of unemployment, of schools and community facilities shut down – and passed round photographs of riot-gear clad police armed to confront black youth in Brixton, and of the barbed-wire nightmare of Campsfield, where asylum seekers are detained.'

### 6 JANUARY – DAY 10

'At the 24 February primary school – named after the date Jose Marti launched the War of Independence in 1895 – we saw all the teachers join the children in their play at breaktime. Every class in the school had one teacher plus an assistant. Visiting this school showed me how a socialist education system can meet children's needs in a way capitalism cannot and will not.'

'An inspiring meeting with the local CTC (Cuban trade union federation), where we asked questions during an open and frank discussion about working class issues – racism, discrimination and employment rights – and got honest and illuminating replies.'

'At the cooperative farm, in between hard questions about the Cuban economy, self-management and the high price of food on the farmers' markets, the rum and orange juice flowed freely. Meanwhile some of us took part in a radio phone-in programme.'

# No Pasaran! learns about health in Cuba

What better way to learn about health and the health care in Cuba than to be there at the end of the year when the infant mortality figures were released: 7.9 per 1,000 live births for 1996. This incredible achievement puts Cuba in the top 20 countries of the world (figures per 1,000 live births are six in England, 71 in Haiti, 51 in Brazil). In the USA, infant mortality for black children is twice that for white children. In Cuba, the figure – 9.4 in 1995 – continues to drop despite the Special Period. Carlos Dotres from the Ministry of Health extended congratulations to all health workers and members of political and mass organisations for their consistent work throughout the year. It is a reflection on how Cuba prioritises health and the success of their primary and secondary services.

The family doctor and nurse we visited have 448 people on their list. Cuba is still working on its 120 family per doctor programme. This com-

pares to average lists of approximately 2,000 patients per GP in Britain. The doctor lives above the surgery and the nurse next door, which means they are able to see people and deal with problems, both physical and emotional, as they arise. Emphasis is put on health promotion. The surgery we visited also uses herbal medicine and acupuncture.

Medicines are subsidised, and free for those who can't afford them, but there are huge shortages due to the US blockade. For instance, inhalers for asthma that sufferers in Britain take for granted are in very short supply in Cuba. While pharmaceutical companies in the USA and Britain fight each other to be dominant on the market by producing new devices, people with asthma in Cuba are living with the fear of having an asthma attack with no immediate relief.

The brigade was taken on a tour of the provincial hospital in Ciego de Avila and given an introduction by the vice-principal of the hospital. Anyone

aware of what is happening in Britain would have been taken aback to find out that he is a working paediatric gastroenterologist...a medically trained person running a hospital. In Britain it is ex-directors of big business and multinationals who are employed on vast salaries to run hospitals.

The main problems in the hospital are related to shortages imposed by the US blockade, such as a delay in rebuilding work due to the lack of building materials, and shortages of drugs and equipment. They are reliant on medical aid, most of which last year came from NGOs in Spain, Germany, Italy, Brazil, Mexico and the Pastors for Peace from the USA.

The 1,200 hospital workers belong to one union, no matter what their job. The lowest paid (domestic) get 150 pesos per month, while the highest paid (specialist doctors) get 400 pesos per month. This represents a wage differential of 2.7, compared to approximately 15 in British hospi-

tals. The provincial hospital we visited was recognised by the World Health Organisation for its mother and children programme. 100% of babies leave the maternity unit breastfeeding (known to be an important element in improving child health). Britain is in the bottom three countries in Europe for breastfeeding.

Cuba also has 1,000 doctors working in 20 countries of the world and Cubans are involved in research such as that into vaccines against HIV, Meningococcus and leptospirosis.

Against the backdrop of 38 years of economic blockade, universal health care, free at the point of delivery, implemented since the triumph of the revolution in 1959, still exists in Cuba, while Britain says it cannot afford this any longer and is closing hospitals, cutting services without alternative provision, raising the cost of prescriptions and exploiting low-paid staff.

Hannah Caller  
health care worker in Hackney



# Education – chance for all

In Cuba education is free for everybody and children are encouraged from a very early age to participate and fulfil their potential. Girls and boys are not separated into different groups and classes. They all learn the same lessons together and from what I saw they really do enjoy school and learning.

The teachers pay lots of attention to their pupils. When we visited a primary school, we could see the children were very happy there. Bright, intelligent, healthy children learning valuable lessons and skills, ranging from cooking and sewing which both boys and girls do together, to science and agricultural studies.

As the children grow up and develop their skills, they are given lots of encouragement to continue studying a specific subject which not only are they good at but also that they enjoy and would like to continue with.

In Cuba, everybody has the chance

to get to university if they want. Again, it's free to everybody. Student accommodation is more than adequately provided for all. Even free transport to and from the university. Remember, all this in a third world country. This is true because I saw it with my own eyes. In Cuba, when you graduate, you are guaranteed a job in whatever you have studied. The chance of that happening in this country is more of a dream than reality.

Student loans are available to students in Cuba if they really feel they need one. Yet if a student graduates with top marks, they do not pay any of this loan back. If a student attains the next highest grade, they need only pay back half of their loan. All this encouragement is offered to everybody in Cuba who wishes to study. This is certainly something worth fighting for.

*Allan Hope  
student at the University of  
Central Lancashire*

## A brigadista writes...

Before visiting Cuba and talking in depth to a wide variety of people, I had no clear political ideal, no real direction. I was well aware of what was wrong with our capitalist system, but not sure of the alternative. Not only have I witnessed how a society can operate fairly, but how happy and fulfilled its people can be.

The contrast between Cuban and British youth is extraordinary – the Cuban child is valued and respected by the system it is born into and consequently has a healthy self-esteem and pride. I witnessed real love on the faces of the young people in secondary and pre-university schools as they talked about their future, their country and their revolution.

But then, these children are born into a collective society where political and social unity predominate, unlike our class-ridden society where the overriding objective is material.

The pride and self-respect of young Cubans must also be attributed to their

strong music culture – music where and when they want it, on the streets, even in the schools. Young 15-year-olds in one secondary school told us how they have music played on a central sound system between each lesson and that they could not imagine life without it. I felt quite ashamed at telling them about our Criminal Justice Act, whereby music and dancing are criminalised. Never before have I been so aware of just how repressed and dispossessed our youth is.

Visiting Cuba has given me a goal, a clear vision of what to fight for in our society, something which had eluded me previously. My aim now is to encourage as many young people, including my own sons and daughters, to attend the World Youth Festival in Cuba in the summer, so that they can get a taste of what they are missing here – sun, salsa and socialism! Viva Cuba y la revolución!

*Sarah Hawkes*

## Commemorate the 30th anniversary of Che Guevara's death...



...with our classic campaign t-shirt – high-quality Fruit of the Loom white cotton, red and black design of Che Guevara and 'Viva Cuba' on the front and 'A true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' on the back. Still available for only £7 inc p+p. Please specify XL, M, S. 'Rage against the US blockade – Viva Cuba!' Che Guevara badges are 50p.

I would like to order \_\_\_\_\_ t-shirt(s)  
and \_\_\_\_\_ badge(s) and enclose £ \_\_\_\_\_  
(cheques/POs to Rock around the Blockade)  
Donation to campaign £ \_\_\_\_\_  
Total £ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

Return to Rock around the Blockade,  
c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.



# World Festival of Youth 28 July – 5 August Be there!

Everywhere we went in Cuba, we saw posters for the 14th World Festival of Youth and Students, to be held in Cuba from 28 July to 5 August 1997. We visited the hectic offices of the National Preparatory Committee in Havana, met with representatives involved in organising it, heard about preparations going on in countries all over the world – and were asked about how organising the British delegation was going.

The RCG and Rock around the Blockade are part of the British Preparatory Committee (BPC), which to date involves about 15 organisations, including political organisations, Bangladeshi, Chilean, Cypriot and Turkish youth organisations, the National Youth Council and the Scottish Youth TUC. Work has so far been slow to get off the ground, but fundraising activities are planned to help us raise £10,000 for the international fund for the festival, and a major event will be held in May to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, which is working

with the Cubans to organise the festival. While it is regrettable that the participation of individuals in organising committee will be limited – so-called democracy on the British left refuses them voting rights – it is vital now that in cities, in universities and colleges, in unions and other organisations, the work now begins in earnest to build a broad and representative delegation of British youth. We must ensure that those attending the festival are able to speak from experience about the issues confronting young people here in capitalist Britain, against student poverty, unemployment and racism, about the struggle against the destruction of the environment and the erosion of civil liberties. To affiliate to the BPC, write to: British Preparatory Committee, PO Box 47, Centreprise, 136 Kingsland High St, London E8 2NS. (National organisations £25, local organisations £10; individuals £7 waged, £3 unwaged). To get involved in Rock around the Blockade's work for the festival, contact us on the address below.

## Rock around the Blockade events

### LONDON

Rock around the Blockade campaign meetings are held regularly on alternate Mondays at 7.30pm the Rugby Tavern, Great James St, London WC1 3XX (nearest tubes Holborn and Chancery Lane). Next campaign meetings:

**Monday 10 February;**

**Monday 24 February** with video showing and discussion on US imperialism's role in Latin America;

**Monday 10 March.**

**Saturday 1 March,** 1.30-3.30pm. Street stall and petitioning against the blockade. Tavistock Square (off Portobello Road),

London W12. Nearest tube: Ladbroke Grove.

### DUNDEE

Reportback from No Pasaran! brigade.

**Tuesday 11 March** 7.30pm, Conference Room, Central Library, Wellgate, Dundee. All welcome.

### MANCHESTER RCG COMMUNIST FORUM

Defend socialist Cuba!

**Thursday 20 February,** 7.30pm.

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street.

For further details contact Rock Around the Blockade, c/o FRFI BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX or tel: 0171 837 1688

## Diary of the No Pasaran! Brigade

### 7 JANUARY – DAY 11

'The brigadistas joined with pre-university students harvesting grapefruit in the school's orchards. We participated in drill practice and dancing with the students.'



### INAUGURATING THE DISCO MOVIL

'During the day, anyone passing through the Avenida de las Flores could see something was about to happen. A metal scaffold had been erected and people were hanging coloured lights to a gantry at one end of the square. A few radio interviews but mainly word of mouth brought several thousand people out to the mobile disco which was pumping out the beat by 9pm. Three of us climbed the scaffolding and squeezed onto a tiny platform by the DJ. We told the sea of faces that we'd brought the sound system from Britain in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. Ten thousand voices responded to our chants of 'Socialismo o muerte!' and 'Viva Fidel! Viva la UJC!' Then as the DJ took over, the bodies began to sway and move to the sound of the disco.

Around the fringes of the crowd were stalls selling peanuts, pizza and rum. Cuban flags, Che Guevara t-shirts, swaying bodies and ever more rum. Three hours later, we leave, exhausted. I have seen not one fight, no sign of police, and no aggression. And now the Disco Movil will go out on the road, in its brightly painted van, to isolated communities in the province and beyond. Life can be hard in the Special Period, but the beat goes on.'

### 8 JANUARY – DAY 12

'In the darkness, on the ancient walls of the city of Havana, a flare was lit and a cannon shot rang out over the bay, in a re-enactment of Cuba's colonial history. It is here, two centuries later, that Che Guevara installed his headquarters after the Revolution. And, in the house that is now a museum dedicated to him, the guide told us how, as a girl of 14, she had fled Batista's death squads and joined Che and the other guerrillas fighting in the mountains.'

### 9 JANUARY – DAY 13

'We were taken on a tour of a polytechnic by a group of students, including the national president of the FEEM (Federation of Pre-University Students), Nelly. They spoke of their responsibilities and liaison with other organisations and the government. Raul Castro had attended their congress and both Fidel Castro and Vilma Espin had recently visited the polytechnic. I was amazed by the political maturity of the young FEEM leadership – mainly women. They gave us cards, t-shirts and political materials. The card I was given read "2,000,000 children in the world are homeless. None of them is Cuban."

### 10 JANUARY – DAY 14

'Our last day was hectically busy as we crammed in last glimpses of Cuba – Old Havana, a fascinating visit to the Los Lobos AIDS sanatorium... before a wonderful farewell supper addressed by Sergio Vigoa, head of the UJC's International Department and Cde Mancebo, ex-1st Secretary of the Cuban Embassy in London, and an emotional goodbye to our friend, translator and solver of all problems, Pablo, who'd been with us throughout the brigade.'

*Hannah, Cat, Ken, Zoe, Steve, Richard, Inan, Dave*



## Zionism on the regional stage

From the moment of its foundation in 1948, Israel set about playing its assigned role in the Middle East: attacking Arab nationalist and revolutionary movements which threatened imperialist control of the region's oil. In 1956 Israel joined the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt that failed to overthrow Gamal Abdul Nasser's government which nationalised the Suez Canal. The 1967 Six Day War constituted yet another orchestrated offensive against a rising tide of Arab and Palestinian nationalism. Israel occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. Despite repeated UN resolutions it has refused to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip and is intent on integrating them into a 'Greater Israel'. In 1982 Israel launched a massive invasion of Lebanon, butchering 25,000 people, to destroy an alliance between Lebanese and Palestinian revolutionary forces. Besides such major operations Israel has launched military expeditions against almost every other Arab country.

Within Israel itself, Zionism maintains a regime of discrimination and oppression against Palestinians. Since 1948, 80 per cent of Arab land in Israel has been confiscated. 92 per cent of the land of Israel is reserved for Jews only - Palestinians cannot buy, rent or lease in these areas. In the face of incontrovertible evidence, the UN in 1975 passed Resolution 3397 which 'determines that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.' Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and as a result of Zionist and US pressure, this resolution has now been withdrawn. But Israel's character remains unchanged.

## ...and on the international stage

Israel plays its reactionary role beyond the boundaries of the Middle East. It functions as a substitute US military force. Whenever the US has political difficulties in supplying anti-democratic or fascist regimes with guns, bombs and torture equipment, Israel, with US financial support, fills the breach. Not surprisingly, Sam Nujoma, when leading the struggle for Namibian independence, said: 'Israel is an enemy of the African people.'

In 1948, D F Malan, founder of apartheid South Africa, a virulent anti-Semite and open Nazi sympathiser, was the first head of state to visit Israel. In 1979 Israel Aircraft Industries built an electrified fence on the Angolan-Namibian border to thwart Namibian guerrillas. In the same year Israel and apartheid South Africa jointly developed an atomic bomb. During the height of the struggle to isolate South Africa, Israel was apartheid's main arms supplier. Between 1970 and 1979 South Africa purchased 35 per cent of all Israel's weapon sales.

Just to list some of the countries to which Israel has supplied military aid highlights its role: Thailand, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, the Lebanese Phalange, Zaire, Liberia, Argentina, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. During Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza's last year in power, US President Carter cut off overt aid to his regime. Israel took up the slack supplying 98 per cent of Somoza's arms. Israeli arms were also used by the fascist Pinochet regime and a special agency of the Israeli Ministry of Defence collaborated with the Chilean junta in suppressing popular and democratic opposition.

## Israel's role today

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the retreat of Arab nationalist and revolutionary movements has not reduced Israel's importance for the US. In 1993 a Pentagon document argued that the US:

# ISRAEL

## ITS ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

US and European support for the Israeli state is frequently justified by the capitalist media by presenting it as a beleaguered democracy under threat from anti-democratic Arab states. In the first part of this article published in December, EDDIE ABRAHAMS showed that, on the contrary, any examination of Israel's origins reveals it to be a racist, colonial-settler state founded by Britain and the USA to safeguard their oil and other economic and military interests in the Middle East. In this article, he shows that Israel's record since 1948 simply confirms this point.



'intends to retain the pre-eminent responsibility for addressing selectively those wrongs which threaten not only our interests but those of our allies and friends, or which could seriously unsettle international relations.'

To this end the US is expected to:

'maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from ever aspiring to a larger regional or global role.'

In the Middle East the mechanism for sustaining US predominance is Israel. Indeed Israeli strategists present Israel 'as a figurative home port' for the US in a 'in a sea of regional crisis'. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and in anticipation of increased political instability US-Israeli collaboration has grown. The US has also sponsored an alliance between Israel and Turkey as an axis to guard against upheaval in the Middle East and in order to project its influence into the resource-rich ex-Soviet central Asian states. According to the *Financial Times*, recently-signed agreements between Israel and Turkey, besides sharing intelligence and training to 'combat terrorism', also 'opened up a route into central Asian markets for Israeli companies.'

The British state, also struggling to secure its portion of influence in Middle East, is increasing its collaboration with Israel. British and Israeli governments plan to begin regular 'strategic dialogue' to develop military co-operation against 'rogue' states. According to *The Guardian* 'The two countries already co-oper-

ate, but the dialogue is intended to upgrade the exchanges and encourage closer relations between their respective defence industries and intelligence services.' (23 November 1996)

## US dollars sustain racist Israel

Israel can sustain its regional and international role only as a result of a massive infusion of US dollars. Israel is sustained almost entirely by imperialist money. Each year hundreds of millions of dollars are given to Israel. Since its foundation Israel has received more than \$45bn in economic and military aid. From 1983 onwards it has received between \$3-4bn a year. 'More recently it has received \$5bn a year in addition to \$10bn in loan guarantees. All this aid has no strings attached. Israel is also the highest per capita recipient of US aid.'

Through such aid Zionism has built for imperialism one of the most powerful military machines in the world; it has also secured for imperialism a powerful and loyal social base. Through financial assistance it has bound the majority of Israel's population to imperialism by giving most Jewish citizens an imperialist standard of living amidst a sea of regional poverty. It has created a national labour aristocracy in the region conscious that its privilege depends on its loyalty to the US, to capitalism and imperialism. This privileged stratum of Zionists is no different from the privileged whites of South Africa who for years served to sustain the barbarism of apartheid.

Indeed all the vicious and brutal racism of apartheid's white minority is mirrored in Israel's Zionist population and acquires its sharpest expression among those colonial settlers directly engaged in robbing Palestinians of their land. It is through such robbery that the Zionist population, even in the midst of severe economic crisis, can sustain a privileged and comfortable existence.

## The destruction of Palestine

Having colonised and absorbed the majority of Palestine the Zionists are working to destroy the last hope of an independent Palestine. Since 1967 they have seized control of 70 per cent of the land and by means of apartheid-like legislation systematically undermined the possibility of an independent Palestinian agriculture and economy. On land requiring intensive water irrigation, Palestinians have virtually no rights to dig new wells. Water from existing Palestinian wells are also siphoned off to irrigate land confiscated by colonial settlers. Today some 320,000 settlers, who account for only 13 per cent of the population, consume 80 per cent of the West Bank's water.

The 'peace process', if anything, has further weakened the Palestinian economy. Today there is no free passage between the supposedly autonomous regions of Gaza and the West Bank. All commercial traffic between these areas is in Israeli hands. Repeated closures of the border are devastating the Palestinian economy. For example, with trucks halted for days, it is cheaper for West Bank

traders to import tomatoes from Spain than from Gaza. Palestinian trade with Israel has been severely curtailed. Repeatedly, Palestinian produce is left to rot at Israeli roadblocks and prohibitions are imposed on importing raw materials into areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

Meanwhile the tide of Zionist colonisers keeps flowing into the West Bank. According to *Nekuda*, a Zionist settler publication, their numbers have increased by some 50 per cent since the signing of the 'peace accords'. Today these fully-armed settlers occupy some 130 settlements dotted around the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Strategically placed, with state funded programmes for massive expansion, these settlements, together with Israeli army roadblocks, have ensured that the major Palestinian population centres are reduced to isolated clusters, cut off from each other and dependent entirely on Israeli authority. A system of 58 roadblocks prevents Palestinians from travelling from the south to the north of the West Bank. Meanwhile, East Jerusalem is being ethnically cleansed of Palestinians. According to the *Financial Times*:

'Israeli governments, whether led by Labour or Netanyahu's Likud, have... used housing and zoning policy, and discrimination over resident permits, to create a Jewish majority in the eastern quarters and make it impossible for Arab residents to build enough to house their expanding families.'

By 1994 Palestinians were already a minority in East Jerusalem.

The signing of the latest stage of the peace accords in January have only strengthened the hand of Israeli colonialism. The *Financial Times* noted that the Israeli government's securing of an extension to the Oslo II timetable:

'will mean the Israelis will remain in control of the rural areas of the West Bank, continuing to surround Palestinian towns with Israeli troops and expanding Jewish settlements further, so that in effect they renege on the Oslo accords.' (8 January 1997)

Declared as a major step forward, the Hebron agreements merely put another nail in the coffin of an independent Palestinian state. Professor Steinberg of Israel's Bar-Ilan University stated that:

'Netanyahu has managed... to reduce the amount of territory to be returned to the Palestinians by being able to designate the military locations which will be excluded from the troop redeployment.'

Thus by the 'final status talks' to settle 'all matters' relating to Israel's future borders, the status of Jerusalem, the Jewish settlements, the four million Palestinian refugees and the future of the Palestinian Authority, the Zionists will have all the cards stacked in their favour. The Palestinians will have no power, economic, military or political, as a counter-weight to the massive military, economic and social reality of some 500,000 settlers the Zionist state hopes to place in the occupied territories by the end of the century. Effectively Palestine will be rubbed off the world map.

The Palestinian people, whatever the agreements Yasser Arafat is striking with the Zionists, will not silently acquiesce to this genocide. The uprising of September 1996 was a harbinger of their anger and their determination to resist. Since then there has been an increase in the number of armed attacks against Zionist settlers. And after the signing of the Hebron agreements all commentators have noticed not a diminution but an increase in tension. The Palestinians are literally fighting a life and death battle for their future. In this battle we know which side we are on.







# Prisoners' anger explodes at Full Sutton

On Monday 20 January the anger that had been boiling up at Full Sutton at the gradual erosion of prisoners' rights finally exploded. The 'disturbance', as the Prison Service insisted on calling it until forced by the POA to admit it qualified for the term 'riot', lasted 12 hours and was finally ended by riot squads who mounted 'Operation Tornado'.

Once the Prison Service had admitted the unrest was serious, they jumped to the emotive tack: 'The perimeter of the prison is secure and there is no risk to the local community', pointing out, of course, that Full Sutton houses 'some of the most dangerous criminals', followed by the extremely unconvincing line that they were mystified as to why exactly the riot had taken place. FRFI has received several accounts of what took place at Full Sutton both on 20 January and in the run-up to it.

Paul Blackburn wrote to us a week before the riot:

'C wing was originally set up with the particular problems of lifers and very long-term imprisonment in mind. But now the wing is either at work or locked up. There's no daytime cooking, no daytime yard; the gardens where we grew vegetables and flowers have been dug up and concreted over; cells have been devastated by the removal of posters, curtains and extra furniture; there are daily cell-searches on the pretext of checking the locks, bolts and bars, although how this includes personal lockers is anybody's guess.

'There's new spy-cameras all over the place, especially on visits, where



Prison Service chief Richard Tilt inspects the damage—rather more than 'two little fires'

there are also squads who jump anyone who makes "suspicious" movements. There have been several fights as a result; how long will it be before a young child is injured in one of these battles?'

Following the events of 20 January, all Category A prisoners from B and C wings have been moved to the

punishment block and all Category B prisoners to other gaols. A prisoner from E wing sent us this account:

'Contrary to radio and press reports the action had nothing to do with a "lack of drugs and recent fitting of CCTV" and was more than "a few little fires"! The action started after prisoner DC was refused access to the gym and, after protesting, was "bent up" and removed to the seg unit. Staff have been swaggering about for some time with a serious

subject of a police investigation, are held without access to the telephone, solicitors or their possessions. When will these people realise that prisons run with the co-operation of inmates and that those inmates are no longer willing to cooperate with a regime which humiliates and intimidates them and their families?'

A Category A prisoner who had been on C wing, managed to write to us from the block about the precise events of the day:

'While we were locked up over the tea-break there was some banging on cell doors, but nothing serious. However, when our cells were unlocked at 5.45pm, the tension was electric and blokes were forming into small groups, an ominous sign of things to come. Shortly after, C wing rioted and began smashing the showers, TV rooms etc and setting fire to various places. They tried to lock up B wing so staff could be relieved for MUFTI duties, but that resulted in B wing rioting as well and that wing is now totally gutted—everything smashed and burned out.

'By 8.15pm the MUFTI were everywhere, the gaol was surrounded by police and prison vans (to ship blokes out of the gaol), there were six fire engines and dense smoke inside and outside the building. By 9pm there was a large helicopter overhead, reportedly carrying Richard Tilt, the Director General of Prisons, and raking the buildings with its searchlight in the best American tradition. This went on until 2.45am.'

FRFI sends solidarity to the Full Sutton prisoners who protested against the onslaught on their basic human rights. We are keen to hear further accounts of what took place and how those suspected of involvement have been treated since 20 January.

## Prison Medical Service – isolated and discredited

Some weeks ago I was asked to review Patient or Prisoner, a discussion paper on the Prison Medical Service (PMS), published by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. The paper argues that the PMS, which has always been run separately, should be fully incorporated into the NHS: 'that prisoners were members of the wider community before their reception into prison and their health care then was the responsibility of the NHS; the vast majority will return to that community and to the NHS on their release. It is illogical that, during the time that they are prisoners, their health care is provided through separate channels'.

Preparing this article, while in a relatively civilised nick, presented unusual problems. There are plenty of faults in the medical system here but they are balanced to a degree by a reasonable attitude from most medical staff. The difference now from when I first came into Risley in the 1960s, or the last time in the 1980s provided something of a culture shock. Medical standards have improved across the board since the 1990 protests and it is easy to forget how the PMS was once so hated and feared; images of absolute tyrants of doctors and medical screws slip down memory lane when I see inmates treated with some sort of respect when they report sick.

Then, on 11 January, came the news that a young remand prisoner, Geoffrey Thomas, had died after being initially cared for by medical staff at Cardiff prisons. The main 'angle' of the story centred on the revelation that until two hours before he

died, poor Geoffrey was shackled to a hospice bed, with two screws in his room, 24 hours a day. I won't dwell on the handcuffing aspect of this appalling tragedy, except to say I am not surprised by any conduct—no matter how callous—meted out in the name of security by craven prison officers at the behest of this despotic Home Secretary. Any system which allows the chaining of a woman at the very moment she delivers a life, will not hesitate to so restrain a man who is on the verge of leaving life. What enraged me most about this awful story was the clear indication of the pain that this young, suspected burglar almost certainly endured before he was taken to an outside hospital and then to the hospice.

Geoffrey was remanded in custody on 23 October 1996. His family say he made, 'numerous complaints of feeling ill' but that, 'prison staff refused to believe him'. However, by 23 December, he was in the prison hospital. His mother, who visited

attitude problem ever since the last successful quelling of a disturbance. The whole regime is based upon intimidation of inmates and their visitors and, as was inevitable, the inmates decided enough is enough.

'The result? Thousands of pounds worth of damage and a seg unit full of inmates who, even though they are



Geoffrey Thomas

him that day, says her son, 'couldn't move, he was in such pain'. Yet medical staff insisted that he walk to the visiting room. He collapsed on the way back. He was rushed to an outside hospital, where seven days later he was diagnosed as dying from stomach cancer. Geoffrey died four days later. I helped nurse my mother when she was dying from stomach cancer and even with massive doses of morphine the pain would break through. We can only imagine the torment this young man endured but we can be sure that he was not given morphine in Cardiff prison hospital.

Many people who persistently

complain of illness in prison are regarded as malingerers, attention-seekers or drug addicts after something, anything, to give them a buzz. This may be true in some cases, as it is of those who attend clinics outside. But in Geoffrey Thomas' case we know that he was not taken seriously until he collapsed 11 days before his untimely death.

Prison authorities will no doubt have us believe this was a tragic one-off. They must not be allowed to get away with it. An apology for the shackling of Geoffrey Thomas is not enough. When I think of the way Geoffrey suffered, or of Barry Prosser, who died in 1981 in Winson Green of massive injuries to his stomach and spleen, caused by heavy blows, and was last seen alive by three prison medical officers, or of the evidence uncovered by *World in Action* of organised abuse in Leeds prison hospital, all my planned reasoned arguments for integrating the PMS into the NHS go out of the window. Geoffrey Thomas must be the last. The Prison Service must get rid of its isolated, discredited medical service now. Get rid of the staff who are not qualified or registered nurses (of 1,474 'nurses' only 282 are registered and 635 are not qualified); those who remain will at least have the advantage of belonging to a proper trade union. The benefits to the prisoners/patients will be incalculable.

Eric Allison, HMP Risley

## IN BRIEF

### Ronnie Easterbrook

Ronnie Easterbrook has been on hunger-strike at Belmarsh prison since 1 January. Ronnie is a 65-year-old life-sentence prisoner who suffers from ill-health and who spent nearly two years on dirty protest in Whitemoor block, demanding he be moved out of the dispersal system to a lower security lifers prison. A protest outside Belmarsh is in the process of being organised by London ABC and friends of Ronnie's. In the meantime we are asking readers to send cards and letters to Ronnie Easterbrook B88459, HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, London, SE28 0EB and letters of protest to the Director General of the Prison Service, Cleland House, Page Street, London, SW1.

### Fred Wright

Solicitors representing Fred Wright, the Strangeways prison officer who is attempting to get damages from the printers of *Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance*, on the grounds that passages in the book defame him, have written to Frontline Books in Manchester, demanding they cease stocking the book immediately. Frontline have complied but plan to issue a press statement complaining of censorship. Independent anti-fascist Manchester United fanzine *Red Attitude*, which is serialising *Strangeways 1990*, has also received a letter, asking it to cease serialisation. Their response was simple: 'It's a letter so we'll print it on our letters' page' and no, they don't intend to stop serialisation; which will doubtless infuriate Mr Wright as there are many Man Utd fans in *Strangeways* who receive the fanzine.

The authors of *Strangeways 1990* are adamant that the book is not libellous.

*Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance* by Nicki Jameson and Eric Allison is available from Larkin Publications, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX, special censorship-busting price £5. *Red Attitude* is available from PO Box 83, SWDO, Old Trafford, Manchester M15 5NJ.

### Hurd the one about the ex-Home Secretary?

Douglas Hurd was Home Secretary between 1985 and 1989. During that time the prison population rose continually and in 1987 reached 51,000, the highest figure recorded prior to today's sharp climb. 800 prisoners were detained in police cells, two disused army camps recommissioned and asylum-seekers incarcerated on the Earl William prison ship, until it blew off its moorings in the heavy storms that autumn.

While Hurd was at the Home Office, Irish women prisoners were repeatedly strip-searched in Brixton and Durham gaols, male screws began to work for the first time at Holloway, remand prisoners' rights were greatly reduced, electronic tagging piloted and the Control and Restraint teams (riot squads) introduced. When remand prisoners at 'Grisly Risley' revolted, Hurd said, 'the shortcomings at Risley provide no justification for the destruction and violence which took place'. A jury disagreed and acquitted all prisoners charged with riot.

Today, the entire political agenda has swung so far rightwards that the same Douglas Hurd is considered a liberal. As the prison population reaches 60,000 and a new prison ship is on its way from the US, Hurd has become Chair of the Prison Reform Trust.



# Lessons from Irish history

## Before the dawn

Gerry Adams. Heinemann 1996, £17.99

Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin, makes it clear in the first sentence of his autobiography that: 'My overwhelming personal political priority for some years has been to advance the peace strategy of Sinn Féin' (p1).

Between 1964, when he joined Sinn Féin, and today, when they find themselves locked out of multiparty talks, lie over 30 years of political struggle. Adams states at the end of the book: '...the republican view that if there was to be peace, a democratic solution to the conflict needed to be found. In our view this meant an end to British Rule.' (p320)

What is not at all evident in this book is a fully worked-out argument which would lead the reader to understand the connection between the struggle to drive out British imperialism from the Six Counties of Northern Ireland and the – seemingly contradictory – present-day 'peace strategy'. It is not that Adams is against political discussion and argument. Indeed, the main theme of the book is his own critical evaluation of the political strategy of the republican movement since the 1960s. Adams is on record here attacking both the leadership and opposition of the IRA in that period. What then is Adams' own political understanding and strategy? Here we find the young republican activist in West Belfast recognising that 'an entirely new relationship between the military and political aspects of republicanism was developing.' (p82)

This relationship is a central issue in republican politics and of critical importance for all political struggles. Adams admits to 'mixed feelings' over



Gerry Adams

the debate taking place then. In 1967, Cathal Goulding of the IRA leadership had made a speech which Adams felt was 'attacking the physical force tradition and favouring socialist policies' (p82).

However, others in the republican movement saw things more clearly and recognised that the debate was not about armed struggle against political agitation, but actually about the continuation of the fight on all levels to get Britain out. Sean MacStiofain, first Chief of Staff of the Provisional IRA, was part of the opposition. He says:

'By 1964, however, it was apparent that some of the new leadership were heading off in a very different direction. They were obsessed with the idea of parliamentary politics and wished to confine the movement almost entirely to social and economic agitation. It went without saying that agitation on social and economic issues was part of the struggle for justice. But I believed that we should not allow ourselves to get so committed to it that we would

lose sight of the main objective, to free Ireland from British Rule.' (*Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, 1975, p92).

MacStiofain, despite his central role, is minimally mentioned in Adams' book, and is considered to have lacked 'political understanding'. Adams actually favoured the broad front aspects of this leadership strategy, which was presented as the 'National Liberation Front', but had his feet on the ground enough in Ballymurphy to see that recommending the demilitarisation aspect of this programme then was 'blindness to the real needs of the moment' (p123).

The moment was 1969, and the needs of the nationalist people across the Six Counties were for defence, physical defence against the armed Loyalists, the RUC, the B Specials and, since August, the British Army. Gerry Adams finds himself alongside MacStiofain, O'Bradaigh and others in organising that defence. The leadership strategy had run its course and Adams admits: 'The republican leadership was in no way prepared for any sort of military defence, never mind an offensive. It was instead engaged in political semantics.' (p96)

Adams' account of the years after 1969, when the nationalist people had risen in a revolutionary upsurge to challenge British rule, is skilfully and vividly written. As an organiser on the run in Belfast, you are there with him and the nationalist people in their daily and nightly battle against British imperialism. The Provisional IRA had split from the 'Official' leadership who were now discredited: '...a people's army had taken shape...it was made up of the sons and daughters of ordinary people.' (p167)

We share their anger, victories and griefs. The British Paras had invaded Ballymurphy in

1971, the year of internment. They shot Jean Connolly, aged 50, and Noel Philips, aged 20. Danny Taggart, a 44-year-old father of ten children had 13 bullets in him, and 11-year-old Eddie Butler was shot as he lay screaming from his wounds. As Adams recognises, such imperialist violence was met with violence – defensive and offensive. There was no question at this time of debating the 'physical



Bloody Sunday 1972: imperialist violence would have to be met with violence

force tradition'. Yet in the midst of this account, Gerry Adams reflects: 'In Ireland, the physical force tradition is very strong and those who are part of it, especially on the republican side, have a huge responsibility to bring it to an end.' (p172)

However, in Ireland it was to be 20 years and more before this strategy could be realised. Adams details the intervening phases of struggle and repression, from the popular uprising of 1969, from people's war to the long war, internment, special category status, the removal of that status in 1976 which led to the Hunger Strikes of 1980-81. Adams openly admits Sinn Féin neither sought nor supported the hunger strike deci-

sion. The men and women in the H-Blocks and Armagh were of course the captured soldiers of the 'people's army', and it was they who determinedly dictated the direction of the struggle inside the prisons. They and their relatives and supporters in the Relatives Action Committees protested and picketed and in doing so took the movement forward. Adams has already said that Sinn Féin's agitation

the streets to engage in armed action they had sometimes to withdraw because people were crowding around and patting them on the back!

Sinn Féin had gained enormous electoral experience during the Hunger Strike, and this, coupled with 'campaigns to reverse the worse effects of discrimination', built their organisation and votes. Despite their initial opposition to the Hunger Strike, these developments were clearly in line with Gerry Adams' political strategy. Having been elected Sinn Féin President in 1983 and an abstentionist Member of Parliament for West Belfast, he was now in a position to 'open up discussion and public debate about the achievement of peace through dialogue and a democratic settlement.' (p319)

It has certainly been a long dialogue. 11 years later, on 31 August 1994, the IRA announced their 'complete cessation of military operations', 25 years of unbroken and unbowed resistance was ended in the search for a 'negotiated peace settlement'. For Gerry Adams and the Sinn Féin leadership, their political strategy appeared finally to have eclipsed the physical force tradition. There is no mention in the book of the armalite and the ballot box combination which was the feature of Sinn Féin's earlier electoral intervention.

As we near the end of the book, having learned of the British government's persistent undermining of the peace talks through preconditions, it is the IRA which is doing the talking again as the huge bomb at Canary Wharf reminds everyone that they haven't gone away. The ceasefire is over after two years. This book ends with Gerry Adams restating his optimism that 'we will have a peace settlement in Ireland'.

Michael McGregor

## FILM

## Michael Collins

The recent ceasefire in the Irish struggle created a window of opportunity for bourgeois film makers keen to explore issues relating to Ireland's recent political history. Jim Sheridan's *Some mother's son*, about the 1981 hunger strike, is now on release, and Neil Jordan finally produced his epic account of Michael Collins' life after apparently waiting ten years to find funding.

It is difficult to see why film companies would object to Jordan's treatment and why the film has caused so much controversy in the bourgeois press, since he goes out of his way to be uncontroversial and blur the relevance of the period for the current struggle.

The film starts dramatically with the aftermath of the 1916 Easter Rising and the execution of Connolly, Pearce and the other revolutionary leaders by the British. As Collins was only 25 when he took part in the uprising, this seems a natural starting point, especially as it

sets the scene for the reign of terror by the British forces which followed. However, the lack of Connolly's presence in the film means there is no indication given of the changing character of the nationalist movement as more bourgeois elements took control and union leaders led workers along an economist path.

The issue of revolutionary violence is dealt with in a circumspect way. Although purporting to justify Collins' approach in using urban guerrilla tactics, which he is rightly praised for developing in response to British terror, Collins is also presented as wanting to end the struggle as soon as possible, and anti-Treaty forces are presented as illogical and murderous for wanting to continue the struggle – which suggests that the current struggle against Partition is also invalid.

A film biography of one individual involved in such a period is bound to be limited,



Anti-Treaty IRA forces on the streets of Dublin

and, by focusing on Collins' role in this crucial period, Jordan does miss many significant aspects of the struggle. One element which is missing is the increasing militancy which developed among the ordinary working class Irish. For example, in 1919 a general strike took place in Limerick which developed into a form of soviet as workers took control of the city for 12 days. This was followed in 1920 by a two-day all-Ireland general strike in support of 100 hunger strikers in Mountjoy prison for prisoner of war status or release, which was successful.

The most controversial aspect of the film is its handling of the Treaty negotiations in 1921 and the ensuing civil war. Jordan presents Collins as believing that there was no alternative to accepting the British demands for partition, because Sinn Féin was at such a low ebb organisationally and so short of munitions that they would be unable to continue for any length of time. There is no evidence for this assertion and, indeed, it was the British who were facing serious problems at home as returning servicemen from the Great War were becom-

ing increasingly militant due to unemployment and poverty. Jordan also fails to deal satisfactorily with the split over the Treaty and the reasons for the anti-Treaty forces' continued struggle.

The role of Britain in ensuring the civil war occurred is also obscured – Britain's motives having been to divide the Republican movement and ensure the anti-Treaty forces were seriously weakened. When Collins and de Valera agreed a Coalition Pact in May 1922, an event downplayed in the film, Lloyd George and Churchill immediately demanded that it be broken and ordered British forces to attack the Four Courts in Dublin, stronghold of the anti-Treaty forces, if Collins refused to do so.

Despite the director's undoubted pro-Treaty sympathies being evident in the latter part of the film, *Michael Collins* is a well-made and thought-provoking account of a critical period in Irish history which will hopefully encourage debate, particularly in Ireland where the film has been very popular and discussion of the civil war had previously been restrained.

Andy Pacey



## CHOOSE THE RCG

If you believe that the treachery of the opportunist British Labour and trade union movement must be challenged, then there is no alternative – **Join the RCG!**

**I would like to join/receive more information about the RCG**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Tel \_\_\_\_\_

**SUBSCRIBE to the best anti-imperialist newspaper in Britain FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!**

### Subscription rates:

- Britain (inc N. Ireland): £5 for 6 issues, £9.50 for 12 issues
- EC/Europe air printed paper rate: £6.50 for six issues, £12.50 for 12 issues
- EC/Europe air letter rate: £7.50 for 6 issues, £13.50 for 12 issues
- Africa, America, Middle East, South Asia air printed paper rate: £9.50 for 6 issues, £18 for 12 issues
- East Asia, Australasia, Pacific air printed paper rate: £10 for 6 issues, £19.50 for 12 issues
- Libraries and institutions: double individual rates

Make cheques/POs payable to Larkin Publications.

Add £5 for foreign currency cheques. Overseas rates given are for printed paper reduced rate and are unsealed. If you wish your mail to be sealed please let us know and we will inform you of the extra cost. I wish to subscribe to FRFI beginning with issue

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose payment of £ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ issues at rate

Return this form to: FRFI, BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX

## MANCHESTER RCG COMMUNIST FORUM

### DEFEND SOCIALIST CUBA!

Thursday 20 February 7.30pm  
Friends Meeting House, Mount Street



### LONDON

### VIDEO SHOWING AND DISCUSSION ON US IMPERIALISM

Monday 24 February, 7.30pm  
Rugby Tavern, Great Millman St, London WC1  
(Chancery Lane or Holborn tubes)

### DUNDEE

### REPORTBACK FROM NO PASARAN! BRIGADE

Tuesday 11 March, 7.30pm  
Conference Room, Central Library, Wellgate, Dundee

For further details, contact FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

## LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX

e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

## AFGHANISTAN

### The role of the People's Republic of China

I share the anger and distress felt by Jonathan Cohen (Letters, FRFI 134) over the seizure of Kabul by the Taliban brigands, and the resultant savage murder of former President Najibullah and others, the wiping out of women's vestigial rights and the general barbarous pre-medievalism of these monsters of US intelligence and their regional henchmen.

During Dr Najibullah's presidency, I actively worked to support the Afghan revolution as a member of the Friends of Afghanistan Society and as the political editor of *Asian Times*. I have already expressed my disgust at Taliban through a letter in *Asian Times* and an in memoriam for Dr Najibullah in the *Morning Star*.

It follows that I do not share the standpoint on Afghanistan adopted over a considerable period (their current policy is not completely clear) by the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, I take exception to Jonathan's statement that 'Most guilty of all amongst the world's left forces is the Chinese Communist Party'.

First, such a statement contributes

nothing to those who must now work to rebuild a progressive and revolutionary movement in Afghanistan, under the most difficult of particular conditions and in the general world conditions created by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Secondly, it completely ignores the context in which the Chinese policy was formulated and pursued. This involves considerations far different in both content and scale from those faced by any organisation on the British left, irrespective of the positions they adopted. Very briefly, the three main factors against which Chinese policy and practice must be considered are:

a) The entire history of the Sino-Soviet dispute. This must include the threat that Soviet dominationism did pose to China's security and legitimate interests, as well as the lessons that need to be drawn and learned from the fact that, whilst the Soviet Union disintegrated, the PRC continues to consolidate and develop its power, prosperity and role in international affairs, making it today unquestionably the main point of reference for communists throughout

the world.

b) The fact that China and Afghanistan are neighbouring countries. Indeed, people from the same ethnic groups live on both sides of their common border. Jonathan is clearly aware of this factor when he notes that 'The (Xinjiang Uighur) Autonomous Region in northwest China has already experienced terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic separatists and such incidents may well increase following the rise of the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan'.

Unfortunately, although some comrades may not want to face it, whilst it is the case that a Taliban Afghanistan poses a threat to China's security in the 1990s, a pro-Soviet government in the country posed a threat to China's security in the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s. No responsible Chinese government could fail to take this into account.

c) The nature of the Afghan revolutionary movement – one that was nascent and, in many respects, unstable and confused. The two main factions, Parcham and Khalq, of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), were not the

Afghanistan's entire population – from the government.

The accession to power of Barbrak Karmal from the PDPA's Parcham faction in December 1979, along with Soviet military support to prevent the collapse of the Afghan government, was declared by US President Jimmy Carter to be 'the greatest threat to peace since World War II'. The Soviet intervention – what was the alternative? – gave the West and later the People's Republic of China (PRC) an excuse to arm the Mujaheddin, the Afghan 'national resistance'.

With many different nationalities living within its borders, speaking different languages and occupying different regions, Afghanistan was more a collection of competing nationalities than a nation state. However the Soviet intervention allowed the various Mujaheddin factions to utilise xenophobia against the Red Army, while accepting massive amounts of arms from Egypt, the USA, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the PRC. The latter allegedly provided 'several hundred Chinese instructors [in] training Afghan bandits in centres inside Pakistani territory' and supplied 'approximately 2,000 heavy machine guns, 1,000 anti-tank rockets and nearly half a million rounds of ammunition' (PDPA letter of 30 January 1985). The other countries of course gave much more – the US approved a \$470m 'aid' package to the Mujaheddin in spring 1985. It

only two components of this movement. There were also a number of significant organisations that, over fairly protracted periods, maintained a large degree of political and ideological unity with the Chinese Communist Party, as well as a certain level of practical, if not generally overt, organisational relations. The most well-known of these groups went by the name of Eternal Flame. These organisations all faced harsh suppression at the hands of PDPA governments – hardly surprising when one considers also the degree of internal and intrafactional bloodletting in and around the PDPA itself! While maintaining a general position of solidarity with the Afghan revolution, I do not think that we should adopt a glib attitude to those factors from the distance, to say nothing of the relative comfort and safety of Britain.

Finally, I think British communists should be very circumspect about pronouncing on the supposed 'guilt' of their Chinese comrades, when one considers the achievements and significance of the Chinese revolution. I would have thought Jonathan would have been more sensitive to such a point.

KEITH BENNETT  
South London

must be emphasised that the motive behind imperialist, Muslim and Chinese support for the Mujaheddin had nothing to do with helping the people of Afghanistan and everything to do with fighting a proxy war against the USSR.

Communists are not pacifists and the situation in Afghanistan in the 1980s was straightforward – did you support the PDPA government and its attempted democratic reforms, or the imperialist-backed Mujaheddin fighting to end all reforms?

The PDPA government did not collapse immediately following Soviet disengagement, as the imperialists believed it would – it struggled on alone. As Jonathan Cohen notes, the triumph of the reactionaries means a return to medievalism. On a minor note, many of the left wing groups who supported the Mujaheddin have criticised their previous positions, now shown to be untenable.

As someone initially opposed to USSR intervention, I attended a well-attended meeting in Melbourne in 1980. At the end of the meeting, I asked a Maoist sitting next to me if he noticed anything about the audience. No, he didn't. Well, amongst the many Afghans present, there was not one woman. To me, national liberation meant the improvement of the most oppressed in society – yet they weren't even there or their absence noticed.

ANTHONY BIDGOOD  
Australia

## Triumph of reaction

Jonathan Cohen's letter, 'Disaster for the Afghan people' raises important questions, especially on what constitutes national liberation? When are interventions to defend revolutionary gains justified? And, in the specific case of Afghanistan, should the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) have taken power in April 1978?

The opportunity arose for the PDPA (with a membership in April 1978 estimated at between 5,000-18,000 – the latter being the PDPA's own figure) to take power, with essential support from sympathetic sections of the armed forces. It did so. While the PDPA was itself bitterly divided into two factions, the Khalq and the Parcham, perhaps more important for later developments was the existence of two armed groups, the Hezb-e-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and the Jamiat Islami. Both would later become instrumental in the anti-Soviet, anti-communist Mujaheddin. Both of these groups had been in a state of armed rebellion against the central government since 1973 and 1974 respectively. A third group – SAMA – was composed of groups that had been fighting the Afghan government since 1968. So by 1978 the reactionary forces were in place and fighting for their own sectional,

feudal interests. They needed only more arms to be supplied to them by western imperialism, Muslim states and the People's Republic of China.

Afghanistan in 1977 was an extremely underdeveloped country. With only 3,728 schools (of which 273 were for girls) for a population of 15 million, only 24 per cent of children aged 6-14 attended school. There was one doctor for every 16,000 people – in some provinces only one for every 50 to 60,000. Infant mortality was 185 per 1,000 live births. (Figures from *Revolutionary Afghanistan* by Beverley Male). Obviously, Afghanistan was in need of a thoroughgoing national-democratic revolution, but it was the rate at which such reforms were to be undertaken which divided the PDPA. These reforms included land reforms: 400,000 families were landless and 80 per cent of landowners owned 29 per cent of the land. The first two government leaders of the PDPA, Nur Mohammed Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, were from the PDPA's Khalq faction, who believed in the rapid implementation of reforms. Despite the apparent appeal of land reforms, mass education and the improvement in women's rights, the attempted implementations led instead to the alienation of much of the rural population – then 86 per cent of

## Jamaica: at the mercy of the US

I spent the two weeks during which the *No Pasaran!* brigadistas were in Cuba on the neighbouring island of Jamaica: a refreshing winter holiday in many ways but also a stark political contrast to all I know about Cuba. Here are a few examples.

The Jamaican passenger railway system was destroyed by Hurricane Gilbert nine years ago; it has never been rebuilt. Trains run, however: freight-trains carrying the bauxite which is dug out of huge open-cast mines throughout the 'interior' of the island. The bauxite company, Jamalcan, has massive powers to compulsorily purchase houses, farms and land and has its own road as well as railway system. (It is not uncommon to be driving along the 'ordinary' narrow road in a rural area, avoiding pot-holes, parallel to the well tarred, smooth bauxite-truck road.) The first stage of the conversion of the raw material into aluminium is done in Jamaica; after that the ore is sent abroad and never seen again. Indeed, people coming from Britain actually bring tin foil for their families.

The Welfare State introduced by the Manley government in the 1970s has been savaged and there is no longer any commitment to eradicating illiteracy or providing education grants for the poorest people to buy school books and uniforms.

Both Britain, the old colonial ruler, and the US, the new master, still hold huge power. The final court of appeal for Jamaica's death-row prisoners, for example, is not in Kingston, but in London. And economically, the US dollar rules the roost, with shopkeepers in tourist areas genuinely shocked if anyone asks a price in Jamaican currency. Even Jamaican TV consists largely of US soaps selling the American dream. It becomes incredibly clear just why the US government hates and fears Cuba so much: it is the only island in the Caribbean where they do not have this sort of influence.

However, wherever there is repression there is resistance and as we left Jamaica, the street-traders of Spanish Town were holding demonstrations and invading council meetings in protest at the bulldozing of their stalls in a so-called 'clean-up' operation a few days earlier.

NICKI, North London

## Socialism is the answer

What is going on? What is happening to people in the workplace? These questions keep running through my mind. Men and women in the workplace are being pressured into taking on more work, as jobs are being lost to boost profits. Those workers who are left have to cope with extra responsibility and are being trained to do jobs that somebody else would have done.

When I talk to my work colleagues about this, they say to me, 'What can we do?' and I say, 'Look at the example of the lorry-drivers in France. They did not have to stand alone in their struggle. We need to show people they can do something. We need to show them they can change things through socialism.'

JH MacDONALD  
Lincoln

For more information about the RCG, why not look up our website on: <http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~rcgfrfi/rcgfrfi.htm>

## EVENTS & DEMONSTRATIONS

### Seminar

### ON THE CRIMINALISATION OF KURDS IN BRITAIN AND EUROPE

Saturday 15 February, 2.30-5.30pm  
Council Chambers, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London NW1  
(nearest stations: Kings Cross, Euston)

### DUNDEE CUBA SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE

Street stall, Saturday 22 February 10am  
Boots Corner, Reform Street, Dundee

### Disco – Club Habana

Friday 28 February, 7.30pm  
West Port Bar, Dundee, £4/£3

### DEMONSTRATE IN SUPPORT OF AMER RAFIQ!

### AGAINST POLICE RACISM! AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY!

One year since Amer Rafiq was brutally assaulted and lost an eye in the back of a police van.  
12 noon Saturday 22 February, Wilmslow Road, Rusholme, Manchester

### IN MEMORIAM

### Terry O'Halloran



It is now eight years since Terry O'Halloran died. On 18 January, to commemorate his life and work, his friends and comrades gathered at Marx's tomb in Highgate Cemetery.

It is important for communists in Britain to remember their past comrades and by doing so to create a sense of history and tradition. Part of that tradition is the work done by Terry in support of prisoners' rights. We continue that work today through the Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund which sends books, periodicals and radios to prisoners.

If prison conditions were bad in the 1980s, they are doubly so today, with a vicious regime operating in most gaols.

This year's commemoration was held with an added sense of loss as we heard of the tragic death, in an accident, of Terry's son James. He was 23. Our sympathies go out to James' mother and stepfather, his brothers and sisters, and the O'Halloran family. The Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund can be contacted at BCM Box 5960, London WC1N 3XX.

## OBITUARY FOR LES STANNARD

Les Stannard died on 18 December 1996 aged 79 after a lifetime of service to his fellows. He joined in the struggles against fascism in the Thirties, became a communist, and supported the efforts to build and keep a welfare state after the war. On retiring from work, he joined with his fellow pensioners in fighting for an adequate pension.

He was known and respected throughout the country for his single-minded fight. He wanted nothing for himself and had to be persuaded to accept the Freedom of the Borough, which he had certainly merited and fully earned.

To say he will be missed seems understating it, for we'll miss not only his untiring work but even more his counsel, which urged us to examine and be careful about the policies we agreed to support to be sure they are truly in our interests and there is a real intention to implement them at the first opportunity. Vague promises to do things at an unspecified future date are of little use – 'time is not on our side'. He knew it. We should heed his example and remember his warnings.

I believe that he pushed himself beyond his strength to give us a warning that a wrong policy was being advocated in the belief that it was necessary to make concessions on policy to win support – but whenever we've won, it's been on the basis of advocating a strong, uncompromising policy clearly stating our intention to change things. So let's take heart and follow boldly the road that leads to socialism and that Les followed all his life.

Though the loss of Les Stannard overshadows all our thoughts, he, I'm sure, would be urging us not to let that stop us doing the work and pursuing the policies which will strengthen our movement and give us the power to fully implement our policy. We in Lewisham have held our usual monthly meeting despite the bad weather, and it is reassuring to find that there is a determination to carry on and do the work Les would have wanted.

Rene Waller



**FIGHT  
RACISM**

**FIGHT IMPERIALISM**

# Whitemoor escape trial stopped

**T**he second trial of the six would-be escapees from Whitemoor prison came to an abrupt end on 23 January 1997 when Judge Maurice Kay ruled that adverse publicity meant the men could not receive a fair trial. The publicity in question was an article in the previous night's *Evening Standard* and editor Max Hastings was summoned to court to apologise. The first trial, in October 1996, had closed just two days after it opened, for exactly the same reason, and Hastings and the journalist who wrote the offending article appear to be the only media employees in London who were unaware of this situation. Unless, that is, the truth is more sinister and the one-time Falklands war correspondent turned right-wing editor, rather than making an unfortunate mistake, was doing his patriotic duty and ensuring the state's secrets remained secret. A case of investigative journalism in reverse.

By the time the trial was halted, it had become evident that the prison officers and governors giving evidence were not only contradicting one another, but were telling a substantially different story to the one they told to the government's Woodcock Enquiry conducted directly after the escape. It had also become clear that crucial pieces of evidence, mainly in the form of video film, were mysteriously 'missing'. Leaping ten steps ahead of general suspicion that 'bent screws' had assisted the prisoners in their bid for freedom, Michael Mansfield QC posed the blunt question to the media assembled outside Belmarsh Crown Court, 'Was this something where the security services set up the escape?'

If such a scenario is indeed the case, and many sources confirm entrapment as highly likely, it begs the further question as to what the purpose of such an exercise would be, particularly as the escape brought such opprobrium down on the Prison Service. There are two main reasons why such a high-profile 'disaster' would ultimately be in the state's interest: firstly, it might have been considered a way to disrupt the 'peace process' in Ireland and dismiss any demands being put forward for an amnesty for political prisoners; secondly, it might have been seen as a useful tool in the drive towards increased repression in British prisons. The counter-argument to the second suggestion is that the government doesn't need to manufacture excuses to attack prisoners' rights: it does so anyway, seizing on occurrences such as riots, escapes or crimes committed by prisoners on home leave, whenever it needs to. There is no doubt, however, that, whoever initiated the Whitemoor escape, it was then exploited for such a purpose.

The Woodcock Enquiry recommended a whole series of repressive measures which are now in operation, not just in high-security gaols or Special Security Units (SSUs), such as the one the men escaped from at Whitemoor, but in every prison in Britain. The Woodcock report tells of an honest but demoralised prison staff running a high-security prison where tough prisoners rule the roost, security measures are lax and prisoners have unlimited personal possessions, private cash and access to telephones. In this context the escape is described as 'a disaster waiting to happen' and has been used to justify the introduction of, among other

'In one form or another all long-term and high-security prisoners in both Whitemoor and other gaols will be made to suffer in revenge for the escape and it will be exploited by Michael Howard and friends to win sympathy for repressive policies already in the pipeline.' *FRFI* 121 October/November 1994

'Although such publicity was embarrassing for the government and Prison Service, it was also of use to them as they sought to further crack down on prisoners' rights and entitlements. Indeed, for varying reasons, a high-profile but profoundly dishonest examination of the apparent failings of the prison system suited the Prison Service, the Prison Officers' Association (POA), the government and the opposition parties.' *FRFI* 123 Feb/March 1995. **NICKI JAMESON** follows the story of the Whitemoor escape.



Andy Russell after being beaten by prison officers on his recapture

measures: volumetric control (limitation on personal possessions to what can be fitted in two small boxes), random cell-searches at which the prisoner is not permitted to be present, Dedicated Search Teams trained to do nothing but conduct searches, restrictions on private cash and CCTV in visiting rooms. Woodcock suggests that closed visits are the only 'completely secure' option for exceptional high-risk prisoners (ie those kept in SSUs – the Whitemoor escapees have been on permanent closed visits, both domestic and legal, for over two years and all judicial challenges to this have so far been rejected).

The prisoners involved in the escape refused, not surprisingly, to speak to the Enquiry team at all. Woodcock also met resistance from prison staff, as did Cambridgeshire police who were conducting their own investigation. A prisoner at Whitemoor told *FRFI* in November 1994 that the main preoccupation of staff who spoke to Woodcock seemed to be 'diverting the attention onto the visitors when they know they should be looking closer to home'. In January 1995 the Director of Public Prosecutions sent detectives back to re-question some officers whose statements were unclear, prior to deciding whether to prosecute the six or not; the officers refused to answer any questions.

The 'missing' video evidence concerns the first four minutes of the escape and some seconds worth of the part where the three prisoners

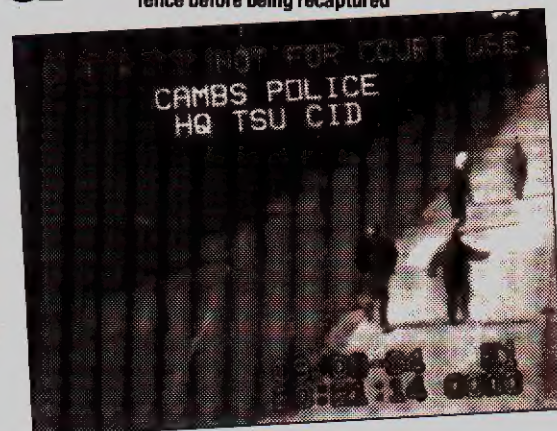
who got over the wall, but got no further, were recaptured. This latter part allegedly shows Danny McNamee being beaten by prison officers and it is obvious why the prison authorities should want it to be lost. However, despite the standard POA denials, the beating is a matter of record. Andy Russell wrote to *FRFI* after his recapture: 'Outside the gaol I had them sitting on me under the same conditions (cuffed and face down) while one pulled my head back for another to kick. It was the same for Danny McNamee...' More mystery

surrounds the earlier film which, if the prosecution case were true, would show the prisoners cutting a hole in the fence with bolt-cutters; if the case the defence hoped to run is true, the film would show the prisoners going through a hole which had already been cut.

The question of 'who cut the fence?' is crucial to the debate as to whether the prisoners acted alone, were assisted, or were entrapped. Furthermore, given that the men were charged not with escape (maximum sentence 10 years), but with

'breaking prison' (maximum sentence life imprisonment), it was important while the trial continued that they prove that it was not they who actually substantially damaged the fabric of the prison and did the physical 'breaking'. Aware of the difficulties it

Over the wall and running – the five prisoners who made it to the outside of Whitemoor's perimeter fence before being recaptured



was running into in this respect, the prosecution had told the judge that they would be applying to have the charge on the indictment changed to escape. But before they could actually put in their application, the trial was stopped.

There seems little doubt that this trial was halted deliberately before it got too close to the truth. Whether it would have got all the way there is impossible to guess at. Likewise, in the unlikely event that Mike Mansfield's demand for a second public enquiry is granted, it may very well be just another, better cover-up. But the 'Whitemoor story' is not going to lie down and die. Among others, the wife of prison officer Brian Curran, 'missing', like the video evidence, since March 1995 when he was suspended from his job at Whitemoor, will see to that, as will her MP, a former aide to Prisons' Minister Anne Widdecombe. There may, of course, be no link between the escape, Curran's disappearance and the death of prison officer Marcia Whitehurst, who was on her way to court to give her second day's evidence to the escape trial when her car plunged into a river. And the Pope may not be a Catholic.

For the six prisoners concerned, the collapse of the trial is a victory and they are overjoyed. They have succeeded in sowing massive public doubt about the integrity of prison staff and have not been convicted of anything as a result of the escape. The next stage for them now will be to continue their struggle against closed visits, a 'security' restriction imposed to punish visitors as well as prisoners, and completely redundant if you accept that the Whitemoor escapees were 'assisted' by prison officers, not visitors. And there will be a further court hearing: civil action is being instigated over the beatings the men sustained on their recapture. Stand by for more revelations – this is Britain in the 1990s and beneath the facade of democracy and judicial accountability, the state is ruthless. ■

## Hunger-strike in Rochester prison

On 6 January 42 asylum-seekers at Rochester prison in Kent began a hunger-strike in protest at their detention. As *FRFI* goes to press, 14 prisoners are still refusing food and two of them are at present also refusing liquids.

Britain currently holds 750 asylum-seekers in prisons and detention centres and the government has been threatening to move the 200 in Rochester to the new prison ship which is on its way from Hudson Bay in the USA to Portland, Dorset. As a result of the hunger-strike this threat has temporarily been withdrawn.

Some of the detainees have been in detention for up to two years. They have

committed no crime except that of attempting to settle in Britain. They issued a joint statement at the start of the hunger-strike saying:

'We are detained without charge or time limit. We make this serious and urgent plea to be heard in full by an independent body... Our action will continue until such time as the above request is in motion.'

Numerous suicides, hunger-strikes and official complaints by individuals have gone unheard. The response of the prison authorities and immigration is the forceful removal of the individual to the segregation unit, placed under prison regulations

without a hearing or trial pending removal to another prison. In some extreme cases individuals are removed to a hospital without their consent so as to shift the prison's responsibility for action.

Approximately 45 per cent of detainees have been diagnosed as having mental or physical disorders and traumas following psychological and mental torture, being poorly fed, and from bad sanitation.'

*FRFI* sends solidarity greetings to the hunger-strikers and to all asylum-seekers detained under Britain's viciously racist immigration legislation. Letters of support for the detainees can be sent to Medway Detainees Support Group, c/o CRE, 16 New Road Avenue, Chatham, Kent ME4 6BA and letters of protest to the Prisons Minister, Anne Widdecombe at the Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT or faxed on 0171 273 4608.

Nicki Jameson